

THE *Ho*
TRUE GROUNDS
AND
REASONS
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION,
In Opposition to the
FALSE ONES,

Set forth in a late BOOK, intitled,
The GROUNDS and REASONS, &c.



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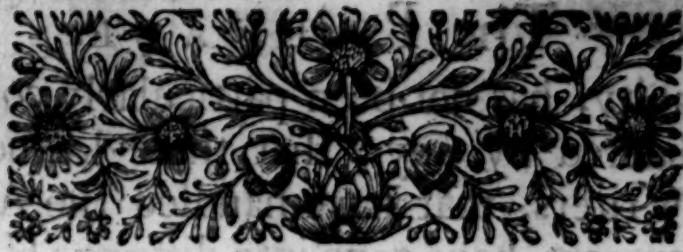
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THE

PREFACE.

HERE have been many excellent Books, both ancient and modern, writ on this Subject; so that it may seem perfectly needless to trouble the World with any Thing more of this Nature: But when it shall be considered, that many of these Books have drawn out the Argument to too great a length, to be perused by those that are not devoted to Learning; that none of these have taken in the whole Compass of the Argument, in the Method laid down in the following Papers; that one main Branch of the Argument, *viz.* on what Foot *Christ* and his Apostles have placed Christianity

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anity, has not been particularly considered by any ; that those learned Writers, that have handled the Argument, have gone into different Hypotheses about some of the most important Points of it ; as particularly about the Notion of Miracles ; and that this has filled their Books with Controversies, which puzzle and confound the common People ; and lastly, that new Attempts on Christianity call for new Defences of it ; when all these Things are considered, I believe it will appear, that the present Design is not wholly impertinent.

When *The Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* first came into my Hands, I saw plainly, that the Author had hit on what was the principal Difficulty in the Christian Religion, and managed it to some Advantage. The Difficulty had been considered by learned Men ; but, as I thought, not perfectly clear'd : This

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put me on re-examining the Evidence for Christianity ; and, in the Review of that Argument, I thought I had discovered the Falshood of any Consequences, deduced against Christianity, from the Quotations of the *Apostles* ; and so that all that was advanced in that Book, however plausible it might appear, was wholly impertinent, if designed in Favour of Infidelity. I imagined then it would be of some use to lay these Thoughts before the World ; as well for the Sake of those, that have neither Leisure nor Abilities for the Reading and considering the Works of learned Men ; as of those, who, after all, might not be satisfy'd with their Solutions of the Difficulty, and yet might easily be brought to see, that the Consequence against Christianity was false. This now is the Design of the ensuing Papers, to represent the Arguments for Christianity in a clear Light,

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and so as to obviate the Difficulty start-ed by the Author of *the Grounds and Reasons*, &c. And I hope this will not be thought at all to interfere with the Design of those worthy Persons, who are about to answer that Book in a learned Way ; and so as, if possible, entirely to remove the Difficulty pro-posed, since my Attempt is quite of another Nature : I have endeavour'd to represent the external Arguments for Christianity, so as to obviate the common Difficulties ; but I thought 'twas necessary to consider the Obje-ctions against the internal Evidence very particularly, because they are such, as do naturally arise in the Minds of inquisitive Men. In the Argument of *Miracles*, I have endeavour'd to represent, what I take to be the true Notion of them ; but, for the Sake of more inquisitive Persons, I have added an *Appendix*, in which are con-sidered the other Accounts that have been given of this Matter.

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T H E



Grounds and Reasons

OF THE

Christian Religion, &c.

SIR,

THE Author of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion, having lately attack'd Christianity, in a Point where it seems most liable to Objection, I have thought it proper to send you a few Thoughts on the *Truth* and *Certainty* of it. This Subject has been manag'd with great Advantage of late Years, especially by the worthy Preachers of Boyle's Lectures: But it has been complain'd of by some, that there wants

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wants some plain and easy Discourse, for the Use of the common People. This is what I aim at, to set this Argument in an easy Light, for the Use of the Vulgar. The Arguments will be common; but if the Method be easier and more natural than what this Subject is, commonly put into; and so the common People, who want the Advantages of Learning, be brought to understand the Grounds of their Religion, I shall attain my End.



C H A P. I.

The State of the Controversy.

THE most Natural Way of Reasoning upon this Subject seems to me to be this:---When a Man has settled the Principles of Natural Religion, *i. e.* the Being, and Attributes, Providence of God, the Law of Nature, and a Future State; the next Thing to be considered is, Whether God hath made any other Revelation of himself to him, any other Way than by the Light of Nature; since it is plain he ought to submit to the Will of his Maker, however discover'd; and ought to use his best Endeav-

endeavours to find it out. Here then he must consider, whether it be *possible*, in the Nature of the Thing, for God to reveal his Will to him any other Way than by that Reason he hath given him: If it be, Whether it be most likely this Revelation shall be made to *every particular Person in the World*, or to *some*, only in *one particular Age*, to be handed down to others, as a standing Declaration of God's Will.—

Next he is to consider, what sort of Revelation his Reason makes it probable God should give; as for Example, Do all the Parts thereof tend to promote Holiness? And then how he would expect it should be confirm'd. And here the ready Answer will be, By such Works as appear to be wrought, either mediately or immediately by God; either by God himself, or by some other Being empowered and commissioned by him: For how can a Person certainly prove that he comes from God, but by producing such a certain Testimonial from him? The Nature of the Doctrine may shew it to be *worthy to come from God*, and gain it Reception for its own intrinsick Value: But, in order to gain it Reception as a *Divine Doctrine*, 'tis necessary that such Divine Works be performed in its behalf. And if there be a former Revelation, in which that Person, whose Character the Pretender to Revelation takes on him, is

particularly mark'd out and describ'd, 'tis necessary he should answer those Characters. This was all those, who lived in the Age when *Christianity* was first preach'd, had to do. But we, at this Distance of Time, have another Subject of Inquiry, *viz.* The *Truth of the Facts*, as they are deliver'd down to us. And of this we must satisfy our selves, as we do of the Truth of any other History.

Now then, when any Objections are made against *Christianity*, let us see whether they touch any of these Points. If they do not, they are nothing to the purpose. Now, if we try by this Rule, we shall find some Arguments, that have been thought to press hardest against Christianity, to be quite wide of the Point. As for Instance: 'Tis argued by the Author of the *Grounds &c.* (whether with a Design against Christianity or no, I don't determine, but 'tis argued by him) that the Apostles have urged Arguments from Old Testament Prophecies, to prove *Jesus* the True Messiah, which in their Literal Sence belong to *others*. Be it so, What one material Point of the Controversy does this touch? Does it follow, that *Jesus of Nazareth* did not answer all the Characters in the Old Testament of the Messiah? *That* had been a material Point: For, if he had not, since the former Revelation was allowed and appealed to by *himself*

self, it would follow, That he was not the Messiah; and we must solve the Difficulty of his working Miracles, just as we do that of all those who have wrought some Miracles, (or at least (which is all one to us) Works that could not be distinguished from Miracles) yet have failed in others that they pretend to; or have taught a Doctrine unworthy of God, &c.

The Jews Arguments, therefore, who are wont to reason, *That Jesus could not be the True Messiah, because he did not fulfill the Prophecies*, are to the Purpose, since they affect one main Point on which Christianity turns: But Our Author has quite mistaken the Matter, if he designed his Argument against Christianity: For all that his Argument from the Apostles Quotations affects, is, The particular Manner of the Inspiration of the Apostles. Now that Point ought not to be meddled with 'till others are first settled. The Inspiration of the Apostles can never be proved 'till the Truth of the History be made out; and from thence it be shewn that Jesus is the True Messiah, and brought a Revelation from God; which Revelation he took effectual Care should be delivered down pure to succeeding Ages.

Now, no Argument drawn from Inspiration affects the Cause of Christianity, but what shews that the Apostles were not sufficiently qualify'd to deliver down this Revelation

relation to us; which Our Author Argument is far from doing, as shall be fully shewn hereafter.

So, to give one Instance more, another grand Argument urged, even with Triumph, by those Sort of Writers is, *The Uncertainty of the Canon*: But this also is quite wide of the Point. For what if it be uncertain whether *all* the Books, we now admit, are to be received, is it therefore uncertain whether *any* are? If *some* Books were doubted of by *some* Churches,----is that a Reason for doubting of *those* that were received by *all*. The main Facts and Doctrines of Christianity depended on the Authenticalness of the Four Gospels; which were always received: And therefore 'tis to very little or no purpose to tell us, that if we receive *some* Books on the Authority of the First Christians, we must receive *all* that they did receive. Surely there may not be the same Reason to receive those Books, that were only received by *some* Churches, as those that were received by *all*. We don't receive those Books merely on the Authority of any particular Persons or Churches; but we believe 'em to contain the Authentick History of our Saviour's Life and Doctrine (which is the Point on which Christianity turns) from uncontrolled Tradition both of Friends and Foes, attributing the Books to those Men whose Names they bear; from their being received as

as faithful Accounts from the Beginning, by those who had the best Opportunities of knowing the Truth of the Facts, and whose Interests were concerned to be well satisfied about 'em; from the Appeals that were made to them by Men of different Opinions and Interests, &c. as shall be more fully shewn hereafter. The time when these Books were put together just in the Order we now have them, is an Inquiry of no Importance, since we don't receive them on the Authority of any Councils, or Bodies of Men, or of any particular Persons; but merely from the apparent Characters they bear of Books containing an exact Account of the Life and Doctrine of Christ. If indeed it could be proved that they were not writ in the Age they pretend to---this would be to the purpose; but nothing else.

The whole, then, of what I design is this—

1. To make out some Preliminary Propositions; as that God can, if he will, make a Revelation of himself to us, and satisfy us that it does come from him; that 'tis reasonable to suppose that he will; and that this should be a standing Revelation, made to some Persons in one particular Age, to be handed down to others in all succeeding Ages.

2. To prove the Truth of Christianity; by shewing what Sort of Evidence might be

be reasonably expected for a Revelation; in Case it were made; as the Nature and Tendency, the Design and End of it, and the external visible Signs of God's Approbation; that Christianity appeals to these two Sorts of Evidence, and is supported by 'em.

3. That Christianiry is put on a wrong Foot by the Author of the Grounds &c; and therefore that all this Arguments, if designed against it, fall to the Ground.



C H A P. II.

Preliminary Propositions.

I Begin with the Proof of the Preliminary Propositions; the first of which is this: *That God can, if he will, make a Revelation of his Will to us; and that so as to satisfy us, on rational Grounds, that it does come from him.*

Now, this Proposition plainly consists of Two Parts.

1. That God can, if he will, make a Revelation to any, or to every particular Person. And

2. That he can give that Person or Persons reasonable Satisfaction that 'tis his.

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As to the first Part, there is nothing plainer. If we can convey our Sense to *one another*, without Doubt, *God can his to us*. He must have immediate Access to those Minds that he has formed. But we shall more easily conceive this, by considering how 'tis we convey our Sentiments to one another; and that is plainly thus: By the Organs of Speech, we cause certain Motions in the Air; which Air, thus moved, strikes on the Nerves which have their Original in the Brain; and by that Means, in a Way we understand nothing of, excite such Idea's in the Mind. Now, 'tis plain God may, when he pleases, by exciting certain Motions in the Air, or otherwise, make such Impressions on our Brains, as shall excite the same, or any other Idea's.

As to the 2d Part of the Proposition; 'tis plain that if we can satisfy one another, that the Sentiments we convey come from us, and no other, God can much more do the same. How he does this we, who have never had an immediate Revelation made us, can't perhaps exactly tell; neither is it necessary for us to know; since when any Revelation, not immediately made to us, concerns us, it must bring sufficient Proof of its Divine Original, before we can be obliged to give Assent to it. And it belongs not to us so much to enquire on what Ground the Inspired Person himself is satisfied,

fied, as on what we ought to be satisfied that it comes from God.

Only thus much we may easily conceive, viz. That the Person, who has the Revelation immediately made, may be satisfied by such sort of external Signs, as may be sufficient to satisfy those to whom he brings the Revelation: And that there are such, shall be shewn hereafter.

Now such external Signs we find in Scripture, *Moses*, *Gideon*, &c. had given 'em; and 'tis probable all who had a Revelation, for the first Time at least. For how could they distinguish Divine Impressions on their minds from Diabolical, 'till they had experienced them, except they had also felt the latter, to be able make the Comparison? But when they had experienced Divine Impressions on their Minds, and by external Signs been satisfied that those Impressions were Divine, they might possibly afterwards be able to distinguish those Impressions from all others, by recollecting and comparing 'em with the former.

The first Time any of us had any Impressions made on our Minds by external Objects, we should not perhaps be sure the Impression came from abroad; for since the Sences are the Inlets of all our Idea's, and supply us with that Stock we are ever after improving, we should not probably at first know that those Ideas were excited

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in us by any Thing without, since we have had as yet no Idea's of any other Sort; at least we should not be certain what Object excites that Idea, as we shall afterwards, when we find the same Idea continually excited at the Presence of the same Object, and that necessarily, and whether we will or no, and that not in ourselves only, but in others also: And then when we are stocked with simple Idea's of Sensation, we can compound, enlarge, and compare these; and so are furnished with a new Set of Idea's from the Reflection on the Powers of our own Souls; and these afterwards we shall be able clearly to distinguish from the others.

The first Time we heard the Voice of a Man we should not know from whom it came, except we saw him. We should believe indeed the Idea was excited in us by some external Object; but what particular Object we could not tell. But then, when we come to see the Man whose Voice we heard before, we connect those two Idea's, the Voice and the Shape of the Man; and when one appears to the Mind, the other may also; so that there is no Need of my seeing the Man again, to know who it is whose Voice I hear.

So in the present Case, the first Time a Revelation is made us there can be no Connection in our Minds between the two Idea's

of this particular Impression and that of God; but when, by means of some external Sign, this Connection is made, I may be assured God speaks to me, when I feel that same Impression which I remember I felt when I saw that Sign.

But whether this be so or no, matters not much. 'Tis sufficient for our purpose that God can some Way or other satisfy us that it is he makes known his Will to us: And this, I hope has been sufficiently shewn.



C H A P. III.

Of the internal Characters of a Revelation.

AND thus I hope I have made out the first Preliminary proposition *viz.* that God can, if he pleases, make a Revelation of his will to us, that it does not imply a Contradiction in the Nature of the thing: But because there are many Things *not absolutely impossible*, that yet we have no Reason to *expect*, we shall be stop'd in our Inquiries after *Revelation*, except we can settle another Point, *viz.* Whether it be reasonable to suppose God *should* make a *Revelation* of his Will to us.

Now,

Now, to determine this Point, we must recur to our Natural Notions of God, and consider withal the State and Circumstances, the Needs and Necessities, of Mankind. God is a Being of perfect Knowledge, to whom all Things are naked and open. He is the most Wise and Holy Governour of the World; concern'd that his Creatures should imitate his Holiness; and therefore concern'd to take the best Methods to incline and direct them to it: And perfectly Good; and therefore concern'd to promote the Happiness of these whom he has made capable of it, in those Ways that he sees to be best. On the other hand, Man is a weak, indigent Creature, standing in great Need of Divine Direction, to make his way to Happiness more clear.

It must be own'd, God has, even without the Supposition of an *extraordinary Revelation*, done what is sufficient to direct all Men in their Duty, so far as they may be accepted of him, and receive a Reward proportionable to their Services. And this shews, that there is not an absolute Necessity of a *Revelation*; and that clears at once both the Justice and Goodness of God, even without a Revelation, since he has already done for all as much as, nay more than any could claim as their Due. 'Tis plain that we can *reason* out a great deal concerning the Nature of God and

Man,

Man, and their several Relations to each other; and from thence the Duties Man owes to God: And also the Relation we bear to, and the Dependance we have on one another; and thence the Duties we owe each other: And lastly, what Management of ourselves is necessary to the Performance of those Duties. 'Tis plain also, that in the general Course of Things, the Practice of those Duties tends to promote our Happiness, even in this Life. So that there is, to one who values his own Interest, sufficient Reason to perform them. And to all this we may add, that there are other Motives to the Performance of our Duty, which *Natural Reason* may make *very probable* at least, if not *absolutely certain*: Such as God's Readiness to be reconciled to us upon Repentance; his offering us Assurances in the Performance of our Duty; and a Reward for it in another World. As to the first, we may argue for it from its Necessity to support the Cause of Virtue in the present State of things, and Circumstances of Mankind. For tho' Virtue be always most reasonable, and tho' it has the most probable Tendency to promote our Happiness in this Life, and therefore ought to be chosen by a wise and prudent Man, yet considering the Difficulty of Repentance, the Violence of our propensions to what is Evil, the Force which sensible Objects have over

over us, by long Use, even from our Infancy, before Reason comes in Play; and how much more easily they strike the Passions (those Springs of Action) than mere rational Motives; and that none have at first the same quick Relish of virtuous as of sensual Pleasure; and considering to what violent Temptations we are sometimes exposed; and what Difficulties, from sensual Pain, are in the Way of our Duty; all those Things considered, 'tis not to be supposed we should in all Cases act virtuously, except we had some Assurances of a Reconciliation to God, and of obtaining his Favour.

But besides, we may *reason* out something of this from the *Perfections of God*, compared with the State of Mankind. Considering the many Difficulties in which we are involved, (many of which are not owing to ourselves, but to those Circumstances in which we are placed by the Providence of God) it can't be supposed God would take the Advantage of us, and upon the first or the slightest Offence utterly reject the Work of his Hands. Further, God now bears with us long, and bestows many Favours on us; the plain Design of which is to bring us to Repentance; which End when it is answered, 'tis most probable he will shew us yet farther Favour.

In like manner, as to Assistancess, considering how many Difficulties we have to struggle with, some of which do not arise from any Fault of ours; as our Natural Inclinations, Circumstances in the World, &c. and, on the other Hand, how pleased a Being of such Purity must be with our Combats in the Cause of Virtue; and withal how easy Acces he has to our Minds; 'tis most reasonable to suppose he would so imprint the Motives to Virtue on our Minds, as, in some measure, to counter-ballance the Temptations of sensible Objects, &c.

And lastly, as to Rewards in another Life, we might argue the Supposition of such to be most reasonable, because of their Necessity to support the universal Practice of Virtue, as might be easily shewn, if that would not carry us too far.

This then must be laid down as a clear Principle, that *Revelation* is not *absolutely necessary* to discover the main Duties God requires of us, or the principal Motives to the Performance of 'em. But then here lies the Case: There are *some Things*, which tho' not *absolutely necessary*, are yet very *convenient* for us to know; as, in order to clear Difficulties of Natural Religion, to make further Displays of Perfections of God, to discover new Motives to Duty, or strengthen the old ones: Such as the Original State in which we were made, and how

how we came into the present, the particular Method in which God will be reconciled to us; the Nature and Degree of Rewards reserved for the Righteous in another World, &c. and these Things we can't know by Reason, because they depend on the Will of God; and though this Will of God be always directed by sufficient Reasons, yet are the Reasons often hid from us. And there is nothing difficult in this Supposition, *viz.* That God, at the same Time he has made such Discoveries of his Will to all in the Frame and Constitution of Things, as, if they pursue and improve, he will accept them to some Degrees of his Favour, should yet, to encrease their Dependance on him, &c. reserve some Things, very convenient for 'em to know, to be made known to them only by himself, when and how he sees best.

But, to compleat this Argument, it will be necessary to shew what Defects of the *Light of Nature Revelation* might supply, and what additional Helps it might give Mankind; and therefore how very convenient it was, there should be a Revelation.

1. *NOW* the Expediency of a Revelation will appear if we consider, That as to the Notions of a God and a Providence, Revelation is of vast Use to clear and settle these. Indeed, the Being, Perfection, and

and Providence of God are demonstrable on Principles of Reason; and they are to be laid down as the Foundations of Revelation; without some Belief of which it can't be received. We can't prove the Perfections and Providence of God from a Revelation, which supposes the Belief of those Principles already; But this may be done: We may have clear, just, and correct Notions of these Things laid before us in a Revelation, which we may afterwards be able to see the Reasonableness of; tho' perhaps we should not have done it otherwise, or at least not so easily. We may be at least excited hereby to exercise our Reason upon those Subjects, which otherwise we should not so readily have done. 'Tis one Thing to find out a Proposition *one's self*, and another Thing, quite different from it, to see the Reasonableness of it when laid before us by *others*, even tho' there were no Proof of it offered by them; especially, when, at the same Time, you are directed to the proper Proof of it; which might be the Case with respect to a Revelation. Thus, 'tis one Thing to see the Proof of a Mathematical Proposition when laid before us by others; a very different Thing to have found that Proof ones self; and a much more different Thing yet to have hit on the Proposition itself. Now, as to these
Principles

Principles, nothing can be plainer than that they are the Support of all Morality: And yet they might easily be corrupted, by Mens Willingness to frame a Notion of a God *like Themselves*, an Encourager of their Practises, &c. And therefore Revelation, in such Cases, would be very useful to clear and correct them. Besides the *Unity of God*, as 'tis much more difficult to be proved than his *Perfections*, so it will admit of a Proof from a Revelation. For when there is One Being supposed, that can neither deceive nor be deceived, any Thing may be safely received on his Testimony: And as to Providence, though some Notion of the *Thing* must be necessarily supposed previous to Revelation, yet we might receive great Light into the *Manner* of it from Revelation, and partly by Historical Illustrations.

2. Revelation is of great Use to Men, in giving them clearer and fuller Notions of their Duty, than what they would probably have had without it. 'Tis very difficult for careless Persons, unused to Reasoning, especially habituated to their Lusts, (which blind and warp their Understanding) to trace out all the Duties they owe to God from clear Principles. 'Twould be very difficult to bring worldly and sensual Persons to such a Work as this. They

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would be prejudiced in favour of their Lusts, and would not attend to any close Reasoning that should shew the Absurdity of their Practices. They would easily, when their Religion was to be work'd out of their own Heads, throw false Colours on their Vices, and make them appear as Innocent, if not as Virtues: And thus not only deceive others, but perhaps themselves also. Indeed there are some of the great Social Duties which Men can't easily lose the Sight of. The Propensities of their Nature, the apparent Necessity of these Virtues to Society, &c. direct Men to the Knowledge and Practice of them. But then 'tis easy *even here* to mistake *Convenience* for *Duty*, and to observe these only as *prudential Rules*, and not as *Laws*: For 'tis more difficult to trace 'em to their first Principles, and to shew their Foundation in the Authority of God. Besides, there are other Duties more remote from the first Principles of Society, and more difficult to be proved; *as*, those that relate to ourselves, exact Purity, &c.---But now Revelation presently makes all this easy and clear. Here is an entire Scheme of Moral Duty, pure and uncorrupt, proposed to Men. Here is nothing strained too high, or sink too low. Here every Thing is settled and fixed, and nothing left to the Humours and Caprices

prices of Men. Every Thing is here set on its true Foot, *viz.* *the Authority of God*; and this made out, not by a long Train of Reasoning, but by some visible Signs, that plainly shewed what was taught came from him.

3. Revelation is of great Use to strengthen the natural Motives to our Duty: For, as to God's Readiness to forgive Sins upon Repentance, *how far* he would forgive, whether all Sins, and presently, we can't tell, because we don't know the Ends of Government that may be necessary to be answered by Punishment. As to Divine Assurances, what lessens much our Certainty of that from the Light of Nature is, That the most considerable Difficulties we labour under are of our own making, *viz.* from those Habits we have wilfully contracted. And as to future Rewards, we know our Services are but mean, and we are the lowest of all Rational Beings; so that we have not Reason to raise our Expectations very high. The most of what we can certainly discover, by Reason, of the Rewards of Virtue in another Life, is of the natural happy Consequences of it: But as, considering the Imperfection of our Virtue, these will make a very imperfect Happiness, so how even this may be interrupted, at least for some Time, by some Marks

Marks of God's Displeasure for our Sins, we can't positively say.

And now, upon the whole, it appears, that Revelation * was the most proper Way of

** As Revelation is the most fit and proper way for the instructing of Mankind, so it seems indeed reasonable that it should be given to all Mankind; for on the same account that it is reasonable to suppose it should be made to one or two Nations, it is reasonable to suppose it should be made to all; the Expediency of a Revelation not arising from the particular Circumstances of a particular People, but the General Condition of Mankind: But then it must be considered, that as for the times when this Revelation should be made, this is not a Consideration of Justice (since God has already given all such helps as that, if they will improve them, they may be accepted with him, and by making allowance for the different Circumstances in which he has placed Men, he may deal Equally enough with all) but of Wisdom. Now this admits of a Great Latitude, and we are often unfit Judges in this Case, for want of a Compleat view of all the Reasons on which a Being acts. In the beginning of the world God kept alive a sense of himself, and declared his will, on particular occasions, by immediate Revelations to particular Persons: When, after the Flood, the world was generally Corrupt, and had departed from the worship and service of God, he called a particular well disposed Person, viz. Abraham, and separated him to himself and promised him the possession of a particular Country. This Person soon grew into a Family, and this Family into a Nation, amongst whom God designed to preserve his true Worship: A body of Laws was given 'em, suited to their particular Genius and Circumstances; which were not designed to oblige the rest of the World. But the deliverances wrought out for this People, when they were Obedient to the will of God, and their Captivities into forreign Countries, when disobedient, served to spread the knowledge of the true God in the World: And this was further promoted when, in the latter End of the Jewish State, at the order of Ptolemy King of Egypt, the Old Testament was translated into Greek. In these Books there were clear Predictions of another more full, and General Revelation, God would make by a particular*

of instructing Mankind in several Things *very useful* for them to know. But, as it was not *absolutely necessary*, so God might make it *when* and *how* he saw fit. And as the Corruptions of Mankind were what chiefly rendred a Revelation needful, so the Time when this Revelation should be made would probably be, when the Necessities of Mankind did most call for it. This was always the *best Way* of instructing Mankind in many Things *very useful*

particular Person, who was therein Characterized and described; the time and other Circumstances of his coming particularly markt out: At last this Person came when these descriptions had raised an Expectation of him, not only among the Jews, but over all the East; when Philosophy had, in some measure, Civilized Mankind, and scattered good Notions of Natural Religion in the World; and yet had, on trial proved ineffectual for the perfect Reformation of Mankind; and therefore had made the most considerate Persons desirous that some other method might be tried, now that the progress of the Roman Empire had made Travelling from one Country to another more easy, by uniting the Languages of different Nations &c. and had spread Knowledge and Civility in the World. The Revelation this Person brought was fitted, and designed for all Mankind; but it was not necessary it should at first be made known to all, any more then that it should have been made in the beginning of the World: But 'tis plain, from the Books which contain this Revelation, that it will at last be made to all Mankind. And there is no doubt, but that when 'tis made to those Nations, that now have it not, we shall see the same wisdom, in the Choice of the time, for making it to 'em, as we now do in that for other Nations; particularly those included in the Roman Empire, to whom chiefly it was made at first. But at present for want of knowing the Circumstances, in which those Nations will be at that time, we are no fit Judges in this Case.

useful for them to know; but as it was not *absolutely necessary*, so it was best it should be deferred 'till such Time as Men were prepared to receive it.

There remains now only one Enquiry more, *viz.*, Whether this Revelation should be particularly made to every Person whom it concerned, or whether the miraculous Evidences of it should be renewed in every Age, from the Time it was made; or else whether there should be a standing Revelation, with standing Evidence. Now if the Two former Ways appear unreasonable, the latter must be pitched on: And that they are so will appear, if we consider.

(1.) That a standing Revelation is sufficient to answer all the Ends of a Revelation: For it might be sufficiently proved by the Nature of the Doctrine, and the Miracles wrought to confirm it, to come from God; and these Facts might be delivered down with sufficient Certainty to Posterity; *as shall be shewn hereafter*. And then it might contain all those Doctrines that were fit to be believed, and all those Duties that were necessary to be done, by Men, in all Ages: And the full Discovery of Divine Truth would be a sufficient Detection of all Errours of Consequence that could possibly arise in any Age. Now, if a standing

2 standing Revelation be sufficient, then it will follow.

(2.) That 'tis unreasonable to suppose there should be repeated Revelations in every Age: For this would be to do at many Times what might as well be done at once; and so would be to do what is needless, and answers no valuable End at all.

(3.) The other Way of a standing Revelation is more agreeable to the Method of God's Government both in the Natural and Moral World. God governs both according to stated Rules, from which he does not depart but on very necessary Reasons.

(4) Miracles would lose their Force by their Commonness: The main (if not only) Difference between a Miraculous and a Natural Work, and that which makes the one more attended to than the other, being its Unusualness.

(5.) Lastly, If every one was to have a particular Revelation made to himself, or to see with his own Eyes the Evidence of a Revelation made to another, *Faith* would in a great measure lose it Virtue; for that is wholly derived from that good Temper of Mind, which disposes a Man to receive Truth; but where the Evidence is so strong, there would be but little Discovery of such a Temper.

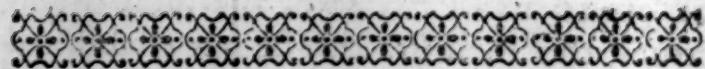
The most considerable Difficulty in this Matter is this, (which I shall fairly propose in its full Strength, and endeavour to return a clear Answer to) *viz.* Whether the Proof of a Revelation, made at the Distance of many Ages from us, be not at least as difficult as the Proof of Morality from Principles of Reason; And therefore, whether, in that respect, Revelation be of any Use or Convenience at all?

Answ. Tho' it should be proved as difficult to establish Revelation, as to make out all the Principles of Morality by Reason, yet would there be great Advantage to Mankind, from the Proposal of a pure compleat Scheme of Morality, established on the Authority of God. For those who lived in that Age would have the Advantage of seeing before their Eyes evident Proofs of such a Revelation, which made Morality so clear, and so would have Manifest Advantages beyond what they had before: And as to those that come after, tho' the Proof of Revelation be more intricate, yet here is a pure and compleat Scheme of Morality handed down to 'em, which perhaps they otherwise would never have had; and they may receive also, from Speculative Men, Proofs of the Reasonableness of it, and its Confirmation by Miracles. However, the bare Proposal of it is of Advantage to

to all, if for nothing else, yet as it may lead 'em to the Practice of the most useful Virtues, tho' their Practice be not established on the most rational Principles. But 'tis of special Advantage to those, that will look into the Proof of it: Which All *may*.

And so much for Proof of the Preliminary Propositions, *viz.* That God *can* make a Revelation of his Will: 'Tis most reasonable to expect he *should*; and that this should be a *standing* one. And if this be so, then we ought to examine impartially any Thing that bears the Characters of Revelation from God: We should wish for such a Revelation, and so be disposed to examine all Evidence for it; and when any Thing appears with all the true Marks of a Revelation, we should thankfully receive it. And when a Man is brought to this Temper of Mind, he is fit to receive the Evidences for a Revelation: Which I shall propose in the next Chapter.





CHAP. VI.

Concerning the direct proof of Christianity.

HAVING finish'd the *Preliminary Propositions*, I come now to the second Part of my Design, *viz.* the direct Proof of *Christianity*. And the Method I have chalked out for myself is this:

1. To consider what the Characters are of that *Revelation* one might expect from *God*.
2. By what external Evidence one might expect it should be supported.
3. How one should expect it should be deliver'd down to future Generations; and in what Cases those of distant Times and Places may be rationally satisfied, that the *Revelation* is convey'd pure and uncorrupt to them.
4. To shew on what Foundation the first Preachers of the *Gospel*, *Christ* and the *Apostles*, have placed the *Gospel*. That they have placed it on a right Foot. *i. e.* on its answering all those Characters of a *Revelation* which any reasonable Man, who has

has just Notions of God and Natural Religion, would expect. And,

5. That in Fact the Gospel does answer all those Characters.

And now, if all these Points are made out, I hope Christianity is fully proved. For let us consider the Thing a little. We are already satisfied in the Principles of Natural Religion: We see that God *can* make a further Revelation of his Will to us: And that 'tis probable he *would*. Well, but if he did, surely he must give us *sufficient Evidence* of it. Let us then consider what Evidence we might reasonably expect: And if he has given us all that, what can we desire more?

It remains then only that we examine each of these Points; and we will begin with the First, what are the Characters of that Revelation one might expect from God; meaning here his standing, general, Revelation to Mankind? Now, in the general, the Answer is plain, that it must contain nothing contrary to the Principles of Natural Religion, because all Revealed Religion is founded on Natural, and signifies nothing except *that* be presupposed. But then, by the Principles of Natural Religion, we are not to understand our mere Conjectures and Opinions on these Subjects; (for *these* Revelation may very well

well be allow'd to correct) but the certain Conclusions of Reason: That it should teach us nothing that is contrary to any self-evident or demonstrable Principles; for we can never be obliged to believe Things contrary to what we see them, tho' it is very reasonable to suppose it should teach us something, we could not have discover'd by the Use of our Natural Faculties; and tho' it may teach us the Existence of some Things, the Manner of which it does not reveal, and therefore does not require the Belief of; and some Things contrary to Reasons less probable than those, which are given for the Proof of the Revelation; and tho' it may express some Things, foreign to the Design of the Revelation, in a vulgar and popular, rather than philosophical manner: That it should not contradict any former Revelation, equally well-attested; for then we have just as much Reason to reject it, as we can have to receive it: For, if we receive it, we must reject another Revelation, which is just as well-attested as that; and therefore might, for the same Reason, reject that, or any former Revelation to which this appeals, and on which it is founded. In short, it must be worthy of the wise and holy Governour of the World: Otherwise we may be sure it never came from him; and therefore

therefore it must tend to encourage Virtue, and promote the Peace and Happiness of Mankind, and the Order of Societies, and answer those great Ends for which one might expect a Revelation from God.

No Miracles whatever can prove that to come from God which our Reason shews us to be unworthy of him: For the utmost which Miracles prove is only, that there is an Interposition of some Beings, superior to us in Power, for the Proof of such a Doctrine. Whether these Superior Beings be Good or Bad can generally be determined only by the Nature of the Doctrine. 'Tis not absolutely certain to us, at this Distance of Time, that the Miracles were wrought at all, but it is even mathematically certain, that they were not wrought by God, or by any under his Direction, for the Proof of a Doctrine unworthy of God.

If it be said here, that we are no Judges of what is, or is not worthy of God, that is in Effect to say, that we are not capable of judging of the Evidences for a Revelation; and that therefore we are not fit to receive one. 'Tis indeed intirely to cashire the Use of Reason; and then I am sure we are not fit to judge of a Revelation or any thing else. 'Tis to suppose there is no such Thing as Natural Religion; and then,

then Revelation (which is built on it) must fall of Course.

There is but one Thing, that I see, that can be farther pleaded for the Way of proving a Revelation only by Miracles, without first considering the Nature of the Doctrine, and that is, That there are some Miracles, which, either for their Nature or their Number, could not be wrought by any but by a Divine Power, either mediately or immediately exerted, *i. e.* either by God himself, or some other Being under his Direction. But I ask, Can any Miracles prove that Doctrine to be true, which is manifestly false? Can I, at the same Time, see a Thing to be both true and false? But is it not more certain that this Doctrine, which is unworthy of God, did not come from him, than that these Miracles were wrought at all? or, if they were, that they were wrought by God? That this Doctrine did not come from God, *i. e.* from a Being of perfect Wisdom and Goodness, here is strict, rigid, and mathematical Demonstration. That these Miracles were wrought, those who live in After-Ages can have only the highest Degree of Probability: Then, that these Miracles could be perform'd by God only, or that they discover the Interposition of God himself, here is not strict Demonstration for that neither. As to the Number and

and Greatness of 'em, we don't know the Powers of Beings above us; and therefore can never certainly determine, merely by the Works themselves, whether they were done by a Power Inferior to God's, or even by Evil Spirits. If they have the natural Power of doing these Things, God may, for wise Reasons, permit 'em to exert it, since the Nature of the Doctrine is enough to detect the Cheat.

If it be said, that there are some Miracles, as particularly the *Resurrection*, which shew plainly God's immediate Interposition: Granting that, all that would follow would be, that the Supposition is absurd. Not that a false Doctrine can be true, or can be any way proved true; but that such an absurd Doctrine was never attested by such a Miracle. But besides, let it be so; let the *Raising a Dead Body* certainly prove God's immediate Interposition, how do I know the Body *was raised*? I should rather believe the Devil had deluded my Senses, to make me believe a Doctrine that supported his Interest, than that God had wrought a Miracle, to convince me of a Falshood.

But let us trace this Matter a little farther. What is this Thing which we call a *Revelation*? Is it not *A Set of Truths made known to us by God*? And what is

God but a Being possessed of such and such Excellencies? And can we have a Notion of these Excellencies, without some previous Notions of what is Worthy and Excellent? Can we have a Notion of a Being that always acts what is fit and reasonable, without a previous Notion of Fitness and Propriety in Actions? Can we conceive of a just and good being, without first conceiving of Justice and Goodness? Are we not then fit to judge when a Doctrine recommends Justice, Goodness, &c. and when the contrary? And, therefore, when 'tis worthy of a just and good Being, and when not? Can't we judge whether the Representations made us of God, in a pretended Revelation, be agreeable to our natural Notions of God, or not? Can we admit of any Revelation which overturns our natural Notions of God, when the Evidence, on which a revealed Doctrine depends, is wholly taken from our natural Notions of God, and when therefore there is just as much Reason to suppose, that the Doctrine is not revealed by God, as that, if it were revealed by God, it were true?





C H A P. V.

Of the internal Evidence of a Revelation.

BUT it will be Convenient to show a little more particularly, what internal Evidence one might reasonably Expect for a Revelation.

1. It might be reasonably expected that a Revelation from God should give us just and true, yet easy and popular, Accounts of God, because on this all Religion, and eyen Morality itself, is founded; and by such Accounts Men might be led to see the Reasonableness of those Principles, which otherwise perhaps they would never have done. The Miracles wrought for the Doctrine might rouse and excite their Attention, and those who wrought 'em might direct Men to the plain Principles of Reason, on which these Truths are founded; and by this Means the Errors of Mankind might be corrected: But to answer this End 'tis necessary the Accounts of God be easy and familiar, as well as just and true; rather popular and figurative in

Some Parts, describing him by Comparisons drawn from the Powers and Actions of Men, than nice, abstract, and metaphysical; tho' at the same Time Care should be taken to prevent Misinterpretations of such Passages.

2. It might be reasonably expected, that Revelation should decide the Controversies about any Points of Natural Religion, and clear up any considerable Difficulties; such as about the Unity of God, the Extent of Providence, the Original State of Mankind, and how they came into the present.

3. That it should reveal some of the great Designs of God relating to Mankind, and the Methods of his Government of 'em, which could not be known but by Revelation from himself, such as the Method in which he would be reconciled to 'em, and the Nature of the Recompences of a future State.

4. That it should give a clear and full Account of our Duty in all its Branches; that it should recommend whatever is excellent and praise-worthy; that it should clear any Difficulties in Morality, and press these Duties especially which had been before neglected, and taken little or no Notice of; and lastly, that it should establish Morality on the firmest and most solid Basis.

5. That it should strengthen the natural Motives to Duty, *viz.* God's Reconcileableness

bleness to us, Divine Assistancess, and Rewards in a Future Life.

6. That the whole Scheme of its Doctrines should not be speculative, (since the Bulk of Mankind are not made for Speculation) but practical, tending to promote Holiness, on which the Happiness of Men, both single and in Societies, does depend: And that the particular Doctrines of it should be so many Arguments to an holy Life, or else tend to remove some Difficulties in the Way of it.

7. That since Men are exposed to so many Calamities, which they can't help, and which their Reason generally proves so poor a Support under it should reveal those Principles, which can never fail of being an effectual Consolation, under all the Troubles of Life, and Fears of Death.

Now then let us see what Use is to be made of these Principles laid down, and how far we are, by means of 'em got in the Proof of a Revelation. I will not say that there could not be even a standing Revelation of God, without every one of these Characters, just as they have been describ'd; but, where they do all meet, that 'tis plain must be fit to a Revelation from God.

How far such a Doctrine is to receiv'd, even without external Evidence of its coming

ing from God, will admit of some Dispute. 'Tis plain that the Principles of Morality, and Natural Religion, which such a Doctrine contains, ought to be receiv'd on account of their own proper Evidence; but the Question is, whether a Doctrine, merely on account of such intrinsick Evidence, should be receiv'd as Divine? A Case or two may be put, which may make it doubtful whether it ought not: As, Suppose some Persons should come with a Pretence or a Revelation from God, and should discover no Worldly Design at all, but forego all their Worldly Interest, to establish a Doctrine, the whole Design of which is to promote Holiness? In this Case, even without any external Evidence, it should seem probable they were commissioned by God. Again; Suppose a Company of poor illiterate Men should deliver a System of Morality, the most perfect and compleat that ever was, exceeding that of all the Philosophers, and deliver a Doctrine which should, in all its Parts tend, in the most admirable manner, to promote the greatest End God could be supposed to intend in a Revelation, *viz.* Holiness? In this Case one might have probable Reasons to believe 'em when they pretended to be inspired. But if the Doctrine contain'd some supernatural Truths, one would most reasonably expect supernatural Evidence

Evidence for it; *i. e.* That some Works should be performed, to attest the Divinity of it, which appeared to be done either mediately or immediately by God. Which brings me therefore to the 2d Thing proposed, *viz.* To consider what external Evidence one would expect for a Revelation.



C H A P. VI.

Of the External Evidence of a Revelation.

TH E External Evidence for Revelation is either Miracles or Prophecies. To begin with the first.

And here we must remember what these Miracles are to do, *viz.* to prove that Doctrine already shewn to be worthy of God, did actually come from him, by shewing God's Approbation of that Person who pretends to a Revelation: And that must be by God's, either mediately or immediately, performing some Work, at his Request, to attest the Divinity of his Doctrine, which is out of the common Way, and not according to the stated Rules of his Government of the World.

i. Then

1. Then a Miracle, attesting a Revelation, must not be a natural Work, *i. e.* an Effect of God's ordinary and common Providence; for that can never prove any such extraordinary Interposition of his in behalf of a particular Person. Thus, the Raising of the Dead to Life is certainly not such a natural Effect.

2. It must not be an Effect of Human Art. It is not enough here that we can't account for the Things, or see how it can be perform'd; for, notwithstanding that, a better Philosopher, Mathematician, or Mechanick, may easily enough. A Miracle does nothing, if it does not shew God's Approbation of the Doctrine; but that it does not, if it can be perform'd by Human Art. Now, my not seeing how it can be perform'd by Art, is no Evidence at all that it cannot. What I ought to see here is, that it cannot be perform'd by Human Art: And this may be easily done in many Cases; as for Example; If a Man should, by a Word's speaking, even at a Distance, cure the most inveterate Chronical Distempers; this we know is above the Art of Man: For tho' we don't know all the Means that may be used to cure Distempers, nor all the Power of those Means, yet we may know that they can't be cured without any Means at all. We may know that they

they are not the Effect of any visible Means, when there are no visible Means; we may know, that whatever Power a Man may have, he can't act where he is not. So we may know, that a Man, who can't tell how the Parts of an Human Body were put together at first, can never re-form it when 'tis dissolv'd; however, not by a Word's speaking, which is no means by which such an Effect can be wrought.

3. It must appear not to be wrought by Evil Spirits. Now, since we don't know the Powers of those Beings, so much exceeding ours, we can in very few, if any, Cases determine when a Work is above their natural Powers. And even upon the Supposition that these did not exceed ours, yet merely their being invisible would make 'em able to perform some Works, which we should call some of the greatest Miracles.

And as we don't know but they may have the natural Power of performing such Works, so we don't know that they are in all Cases lain under absolute Restraints by God from exerting it; but this we know, that Evil Spirits would never exercise their Power for the advancing a Doctrine, the whole Design of which was to promote Holiness: And that tho' they are not lain under such absolute Restraints, yet that they are restrain'd from performing very many and great Works,

and superior to all wrought on the other side, in order to attest a Doctrine bearing all the Characters of a Divine Revelation; for then Men would be left by God under an absolute Necessity of being deceiv'd, even in a Matter of the greatest Consequence; which is the same Thing as if God had deceiv'd 'em himself, and God would have precluded himself from all Power of making any standing Revelation to his Creatures, confirm'd by standing Evidence; which yet, I have shewn, is reasonable to suppose he should make.



C H A P. VI.

The Evidence of Prophecies.

AND thus I have considered what Evidence Miracles bring to a Revelation, I am next to consider the Evidence of Prophecy, or Predictions of the Person himself who pretends to a Revelation of some future Contingencies. Now, besides the Evidence this may bring to a Revelation in the same Way as Miracles have been explain'd to do before, it carries some additional Evidence,

as

as it seems to discover a more immediate Interposition of divine Providence in behalf of a Person : As thus — Tho' it should be suppos'd that Evil Spirits, by their natural Sagacity, might be able to predict how Men would act, if left to themselves, yet, as they are not the Governours of the World, but under the Power of the Supreme Being, so they can never tell when, and how God will interpose, and direct Things otherwise than they would happen if Men only were concern'd in bringing 'em to pass : And therefore they must be often out in their Predictions, and could never be sure, in those Cases, where 'tis plain God did extraordinarily interpose, and where Things did not happen as sagacious Spirits would conjecture, from the Dispositions of Men, and the Circumstances they were in, but quite the contrary. Now, when such Events, about which there was a plain Interposure of Providence to bring 'em to pass, are predicted, and do accordingly come to pass, exactly, in all the minutest Circumstances, as foretold, this shews the Prediction came from the same Being that interposed to bring about the Event : And thus the Prophecy and the Providence do lend mutual Light to each other.

This is enough to establish a Revelation, where there is no former Revelation that has

predicted a certain Person to come with such a Revelation as this, and particularly described him ; but where there is, he must answer the Characters therein given ; otherwise his Pretence to a Revelation is spoilt, and the proper Proof that he is that particular Person promised is, that he agrees to the Characters there given of him.

It does not necessarily follow, from his answering the Characters there given of him, that he is that Person ; but only, when a Person, so and so qualified, bringing a Doctrine worthy of God, working Miracles, &c. answers those Characters, he must be the Man. Any one's not answering the Characters will certainly prove him not the Person promised ; but his answering 'em of itself won't certainly prove that he is. A Man must be prov'd to come from God in the Way above described, before he is proved to come from him on a particular Errand. Indeed, it may afford a probable Presumption, when a Person hits on many, especially on all of these Characters, and should put us on more diligent Inquiries into his Doctrine, and the Proofs : But still, if his Doctrine, on Examination be found unworthy of God, he can't be sent of God at all, and therefore not on this particular Errand. And if he be sent of him, 'tis reasonable to expect God would give him the Attestation of Miracles. If there be any

any Thing more in this Argument of Agreement with ancient Predictions, 'tis this, That it supposes Miracles wrought in a Person's behalf; and then it falls in with a former Head.

There remains only one Thing to make the Evidence for a Revelation compleat; and that is the Proof of the Facts, especially to those who live at some Distance from the Time and Place when, and where they are said to be done. Now here 'tis plain we must be satisfied with moral Evidence. 'Tis enough if there be no just Reason to doubt of the Truth of the Facts, tho' they may possibly be false. On such Evidence as this, all the great Affairs of the World are carried on. And if we are, with good Reason, satisfied with it in other Cases, we ought to be in those where Religion is concern'd. We ought to be satisfied with the same Proofs of the Ability and Integrity of the Witnesses to the Facts, with which we are reasonably in all other like Cases. And the same may be said for the Tradition of the Facts to future Generations.





C H A P. VII.

On what Foot Christ &c. put Christianity.

I Come now to shew on what Foot Christ and the Apostles have put the Cause of Christianity.

1. On the Nature of the Doctrine: That 'tis worthy of God; that it tends to promote Holiness, and overthrow the Devil's Kingdom; and that discovers no worldly Design in the Preacher of it, see *Job.* v. 41. and vii. 18. and viii. 49, 50. But the most remarkable Passage of all to this Purpose, is in the 12th of *Mat.* where when our Saviour was accused of casting out Devils by *Belzebub*, the Prince of the Devils; he does not answer that such Miraculous Works were above the Power of the Devil, nay, he rather seems to allow, that they were not, as Mr. *Bayly*, judiciously observes; but he argues that the Devil would not perform 'em, to the Destruction of his own Kingdom: Now the whole Force of that Argument does not lie here (as one would be apt at first to imagine) *viz.* that the Devils being all Confederates, one Devil

Devil would 'not cast out another, because that would be warring against himself ; for that might be supposed to be done by Agreement, where the common Interest was promoted by it ; but here lies the maine Force of the Argument, the Devil would never help me to promote a Doctrine, whose whole Tendency is to destroy Idolatry, and all other his Works.

2. On Miracles, see to that purpose, *Math.* xi. from the 2 to 6. *Mat.* xii. 31. *John* x. 25, 38, 39. *John* xv. 24. *John* xx. 30. 31. *Luke* xxiv. 49. *Acts* i. 4, 5, 8. *Acts* ii. 22. *Acts* v. 32. *Acts* x. 38. *Heb.* ii. 4. Particularly on the Miracles of Christ's Resurrection. See *Acts* i. 22. *Acts* ii. 32. *Acts* iv. 15. *Acts* iv. 33. *Rom.* i. 4. *Rom.* iv. 24. *Rom.* x. 9.

3. On Predictions verified, *Mat.* xii. 39. 40. *Math.* xvi. 4. *John* ii. 18, 19, 22. And perhaps the Sign the *Jews* required, after all our Saviour's Miracles, was the verifying some Predictions ; and accordingly he gives 'em the Prediction of his own Resurrection.

4. On Agreement, with ancient Prophe-tick Characters. The Apostles proved that *Jesus* was a Man approved of God, by the many Signs and Wonders that he did ; but that he was that particular Person, that was promised the *Jews*, they prove from the

Char-

Characters of the *Messiah* in their Books, and they put the Matter on this Issue, That if he did not answer those Characters, he was to be rejected as an Impostor, and our Saviour had argued just in the same Manner before 'em. See *Math.* xi. 5. compar'd with *Isa.* xxxv. 5. and 6. and with *Isa.* lxi. 1. *John* v. 37, 38, 39, 46, 47. *Act's* ii. from the 16 to the 36. Chap iii. from the 18 to 26. Chap. viii. from the 32 to 37. Chap. x. 43. Chap. xiii. from the 33 to 37. Chap. xvii. 2, 3, 11. Chap. xviii. 28. Chap. xxvi. 22, 23, 27. Chap. xxviii. 23. But then 'tis plain they did not wholly insist on this Argument; for sometimes the very Thing said to be prophesied of were Miracles, and then that afforded a distinct Argument, as *Mat.* xi. 5. *Act's* ii. 17. 27. and at the same they do mention other Arguments, as particularly the Resurrection: So that all these Things considered, the only Use they appear to have made of this Argument, was to prove that *Jesus* (whose Doctrine was so worthy of God, and whose divine Mission was attested by such Miracles) was that particular Person, that was promised to the *Jews* by his Agreement, to all the Characters given of him in the Old Testament; and so far the Argument was strong and conclusive, as shall be shown hereafter.

CHAP. VIII

Internal Characters of a Revelation applied to the Gospel.

Come now, according to my proposed Method, to the last Part of the Proof of Christianity. I have shewn, that it implies no Contradiction for God to make a Revelation of his Will to us; and that he can do it, so as to satisfy us that it comes from him: That, considering the Circumstances of Mankind, 'tis probable that he would; and that 'tis most likely this would be, not a particular Revelation made to every Person in every Age, or to some in every Age; but a standing Revelation, made in one particular Age, when God saw fittest and best to make it, and designed to be handed down to Posterity. I have largely shewn what one would expect should be the internal Characters of a Revelation from God; and what external Marks one would reasonably expect God should give of his Approbation of it; and how the Facts on which it depends might be delivered down, with sufficient Security, to those that live at a considerable Distance from the Time when, and Place where,

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they are said to be done. I have also considered on what Ground Christ and the Apostles have placed the Gospel; and have shewn that they have appealed to the united Evidence mentioned above, and not to one single Argument of Prophecies, in the Way Mr. C. supposes: That they prove Christ to be a Person worthy to come from God by the Nature and Excellency of his Doctrine; that he actually did come from God by the miraculous Works performed to attest his Doctrine, particularly by his own Resurrection; and that he was the particular Person promised the Jews, by his exact Agreement to the Characters of that Person in their Books. To compleat, then, the Proof of Christianity there remain but Two Things.

1. To apply the internal and external Characters of a Revelation to the Gospel, *as 'tis now delivered to us*, and shew that they do exactly agree to it. And,

2. To prove the Truth of the Facts, *as they are delivered to us*.— And when this is done, I shall go on to apply the Principles laid down to Mr. C's Arguments, and from thence lay open their Fallacy.

I am now to apply the Characters of a Revelation to the Gospel; and I begin with the internal ones. Now here I must observe, that the Proof of this Point depends on the Particulars of the Gospel-History; to which there-

therefore I must refer you for full Satisfaction in this Matter. All that I shall do, therefore, at present, shall be to represent one of the principal Characters of a Revelation, and apply it to the Gospel, and remove any Difficulty about the rest that may occur. The Character that I shall single out shall be the 6th, (mentioned before) *viz.* That the whole Scheme of its Doctrines should not be *speculative* (since the Bulk of Mankind are not made for Speculation) but *practical*, tending to promote Holiness, on which the Happiness of Men, both single and in Societies, does depend; and that the particular Doctrines of it should be so many Arguments to an holy Life. Now that this is the Case with respect to the Gospel will easily appear to one that considers it. None of the Doctrines of Christianity are Matters of Speculation. Our Faith is concerned in 'em no farther than as they are revealed; and as such they are Matters of Testimony, and to be received on the Credit of the Revealer, (which the meanest Person is capable of) and not as proved from the Reason of Things, which would belong only to Scholars. We are to believe only the Things as revealed in Scripture; the unrevealed *Modus* we have nothing to do with. Thus, for Instance, we are, on the Authority of a God of infinite Truth, to believe, that our

Bodies shall be raised again: Which is a plain Matter of Testimony, that all Men can understand at first hearing; but the particular Manner in which our Bodies shall be raised (which is a Matter of very nice Speculation) we are not at all required to believe.

Now, that the whole Scheme of the Doctrines of the Gospel tends to promote Holiness, is as plain as any Thing can possibly be. It reveals our Duty in its full Compass and Extent; sets in a clear and full Light the natural Motives to the Performance of it. Christ came from Heaven to proclaim a Pardon for our Sins on Repentance; to offer us Assurances in Performance of our Duty. Those things which before were but probable he has revealed as certain: Those Things of which before we had but an imperfect Account, he has fully delivered. He has revealed, not only future Rewards in general, but set out the Nature, Greatness and Duration of 'em in a clear and strong Light. Add to all this, that he has super added new Motives to the Performance of our Duty; such as (1.) His *Incarnation*; which shews God's great Love to Mankind, the Value he sets on us, and what Returns he justly expects from us. (2.) His *Life*; which was a Pattern of all Sorts of Virtues. (3.) His *Death*; by which his holy Doctrine was confirmed, and by which the New Covenant, which proposes

poses such Encouragement to our Duty, was ratified. (4.) His *Resurrection*; by which we are assur'd of eternal Life, as the Reward of our Services. (5.) His *Advocacy* and *Mediation*; which encourages our Acces to God. And (6.) *lastly*, his *coming to Judgment*; which has a Tendency always to keep us circumspect.

This is the main Scheme of the Gospel; and 'tis easy to see how, in all its Parts, it tends to promote Holiness. The particular Doctrines of Christianity are either, so many direct Arguments to an holy Life, or tend to add Strength and Force to other Arguments, as the Doctrine of Christ's Divinity heightens the Value of his Sacrifice; or *lastly*, tend to remove some Difficulty out of the Way, as by the Account of the original State of Mankind, giving us a fairer View of Providence.

The Doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity, which has been represented by some as a speculative Doctrine, was revealed only to lay a Foundation for our conceiving the Work of Redemption; which is of the vastest Importance as to our Practice; to shew us the Method of our Acces to God in our present fallen State; to heighten our Sense of God's Goodness towards us, and thereby lay new Obligations on us to our Duty; to direct us

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what Duties we are to pay to each of the Divine Persons concerned in our Redemption.

And, lastly, the Gospel is not only adapted to promote Holiness, in the main Scheme and Frame of its Doctrines, but also in the external, ritual, and positive Precepts of it. These, it must be owned, are very few. The main Part of Christianity is taken up in the recommending of Holiness, and such Doctrines as tend to promote it. And those Precepts, which are of a positive Nature, are wisely framed to secure the main Design of Christianity. Thus, for Example, 'twas necessary for the preserving Christ's Institutions, and delivering 'em down to Posterity, as well as for the promoting Piety and Charity, that his Followers should unite in Societies, according to the Rules their Great Master has fix'd. Now, in Societies, there is generally some solemn Rite by which Persons are admitted; and accordingly *Baptism* was instituted for this Purpose by our Saviour. Now, the general Design of this was, that Persons might solemnly take on 'em the Obligations of the Gospel to an holy Life; and this was particularly signified by the Manner in which this Rite was administered; and then that they might receive a Right to the Blessings promised in the Gospel; one of the principal of which was the Assistance of

of the Spirit, to enable 'em to perform their Duty. Again, 'twas necessary, to attain the Ends for which these Societies were erected, that there should be some to preside in them. There can be no Societies without some Order, a Subordination of some Parts to others. And in the present Case there must be some to direct the publick Worship, some to instruct and teach others, and some to exercise the instituted Discipline. 'Twas necessary that particular Orders should be given about these Things, suited to the particular Circumstances of the Age, Places, and Persons: But where those Circumstances are not the same, those of another Age and Nation seem only obliged by the general Precepts. So that perhaps it may be doubted, whether the Rules given in the New Testament, concerning these Matters, may be said to be wholly of a positive Nature: But, however, they were evidently adapted to secure the main End, *viz.* Holiness. The *Lord's Supper* is evidently a positive Precept; but is far from being a superstitious and insignificant Rite. There was nothing more common, both among Jews and Heathens, than commemorative Feasts; and of such a Nature is this, designed to bring Christ to our Remembrance, his excellent Doctrine, his holy Life, and particularly his Death as a Sacrifice for our Sins; which lays the strongest Obligations

tions on us to Holiness, both as it shews us, on the one Hand, the great Love of God towards us, and on the other, his strict Regard to the Honour of his Laws and Government.



C H A P. IX.

Answer to Objections relating to internal Characters.

THUS have I shewn how Christianity in all its Parts hath a Tendency to promote Holiness; and come now, according to my Promise, to consider any Difficulties that may attend any other of the internal Characters of a Revelation. That all its Doctrines must be agreeable to Reason, so as they can't any of 'em be proved to imply a Contradiction; that there be nothing contrary to our natural Notions of God, or that weaken the Obligations to Virtue is evident. But concerning each of these there is some considerable Difficulty. As to the first it would vastly exceed the Limits of such a Discourse, and at the same Time would be an Undertaking too difficult for me, to give a rational Account of all the Doctrines

Doctrines of Christianity, tho' I am perfectly of Mr. Watt's Mind that this may be done. All I can do will be just to point to some General Principles, by which Persons of clear and rational Heads may be led fully to explain this Matter. Here then we must carefully distinguish between Things *above*, and *contrary to* Reason. We can't believe a Proposition, when we don't understand the Terms in which 'tis expressed; or when the Terms are contradictory, and destroy one another; or when there appears such a Contradiction to us: For a Proposition, the Terms of which are not understood, is nothing at all to us; and when a Thing appears a Contradiction to us, we can't believe it; for, appearing a Contradiction to us, we must take it to be false, and yet, believing it, we must take it to be true too at the same Time; which is as great an Absurdity as can be expressed in Words. But then this we may do: We may and ought to believe a Doctrine on the Authority of God revealing it to us, which our own Reason had discover'd nothing at all of. 'Tis no Objection against a Doctrine of Revelation, to say that we can't trace it out from the First Principle of Reason, when nothing can be more reasonable to suppose, than that, when God made a Revelation of his Will to us, he should deliver some such Doctrines; and

when it would rather have been an Objection against a Revelation, if it had none such ; and when Reason dictates nothing as a surer Principle than this, *God hath said a Thing, therefore 'tis true.* So that I can't but stand amaz'd at the Saying of a late bold Writer, viz. 'That Testimony can only be a Means of Information, not a Ground of Assent.'

But to go a little farther. We may understand the Terms in which a Proposition is expressed, when we do not understand something else about the Subject of the Proposition. But then we are required only to believe that Proposition which we do understand. As for Instance, We understand the Terms of this Proposition. *The Dead shall rise again* ; and we believe it merely on the Authority of Revelation ; but we don't know *how* they will be rais'd, neither do we believe any Thing about it. Again ; We believe many Things, with good Reason, on the Authority of Revelation, when antecedently to the Revelation, we believed otherwise on probable Reasons : For this is only making a lesser Evidence submit to a greater. Thus (to resume the Instance just mention'd) considering that the natural Immortality of the Soul answers all the Ends, for which Reason leads us to suppose a Future State, it seemed probable to meer Philosophers,

phers, that the Body should not rise again ; and yet, on the Authority of Revelation, they ought to have believed that **Doctrine**.

'Tis no Objection to any Proceedings of Divine Providence, made known by Revelation, that they are contrary to our imperfect Views of Things. A Method may be agreeable to the highest Wisdom, and yet contrary to some Reasons which Persons of short Views may have suggested to their Minds. And, lastly, 'tis no Objection against a **Doctrine**, if at first it appears to be contradictory, whilst, on a more thorough Examination, the **Contradiction** vanishes.

And now, if these few plain Hints be carefully applied to the **Doctrines of the Trinity, Satisfaction, Eternity of Hell, Torments, Resurrection of the Body, &c.** as revealed in Holy Scripture, I will take the Liberty to say, that they may be shewn to be perfectly reasonable, and fit to be believed. And this may suffice for the first Difficulty. The Consideration of the Second shall be the Subject of the next Chapter.



C H A P. X.

The Gospel not contradictory to the Mosaick Law.

IT may be queried then, Whether the *Christian* Revelation be not contrary to the *Mosaick*, since the one gave a Body of Laws, which it declared should be of perpetual **Obligation**, and the other is supposed to abrogate them? Now, before an Answer can be return'd to this Difficulty, we must consider the true State of the Case: For if it should appear, that neither did the *Mosaick* Revelation establish these Laws for ever, nor the *Christian* abrogate them, in the Sense supposed in the Objection, all the Difficulty vanishes. The Case then, with Respect to the *Mosaick* Revelation is this: It did indeed establish a Set of Laws for the Jews, when they took Possession of *Canaan*, which they were to observe for ever; *i. e.* as long as they continued a Body Politick in their own Land; without which many of their Laws could not be observed. The Word in Scripture, by which *Eternity* is denoted, does not, by its own intrinsick Force, signify

signify what we mean by *Eternity* in *English*, but is to be interpreted according to the Things to which it is applied. Thus *eternal God* and *eternal Mountains* are understood very differently. An *eternal Servitude* is such as lasts as long as a Person lives, or (according to the *Jewish Way*) 'till the *Jubilee*, when Slaves were released of Course. Thus the *Mosaick Laws* were *eternal*, as they were to last (not for a determinate Number of Years, or during particular Occasions and Emergencies, as in the Wilderness, &c.) but as long as their Polity lasted. Then as for the *Christian Revelation*, that did not properly abrogate the *Jewish Laws* at all. These never obliged the Gentiles, and 'twas the Imposition of them which the Apostles set themselves most vehemently against. After the Destruction of the Temple, and Dispersion of the *Jews*, the most considerable of 'em could not be observed at all. Then the whole Frame of 'em belonged to the *Jews* as a Body Politick, seperated from the rest of the World, by the peculiar Favour of God, and distinguish'd by peculiar Rites and Observances: But, upon their obstinate rejecting of the Gospel, as a Body, (tho' some few particular Persons received it) they were, as such, rejected of God: And therefore their political, and distinguishing Laws ceased of Course,

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as Martial Laws in Time of Peace ; and the few Remains of the *Jewish* Nation were engrafted into the *Christian* Church, not upon any peculiar political Terms, but upon the One Catholick Term of Faith in Christ, common to them with the Gentiles.

Thus the Obligation of these Laws ceased, not by any positive Abrogation, but from the very Reason and Nature of Things, which would have been just the same, tho' the Gospel had never appear'd. Indeed, these Laws did not immediately become unlawful to be observed by the *Jews* : The Things enjoyned became indifferent. The Reasons of the Law were ceased, and therefore the Obligation to it was ceased also. But the Apostles did very well to observe it, when thereby they should have a Prospect of gaining the *Jews*, and removing a main Obstacle in the Way of their Conversion : And therefore, with very good Reason, St. *Paul* endeavours, in the *Acts*, to clear himself of the Charge laid against him, of *setting at nought the Law*, The Fault lay not in *observing 'em*, but *observing 'em as necessary* ; in *imposing 'em* as such on others, especially on the Gentiles, and laying the Stress of their Salvation on the Observation of the Law, (according to which, since it required perfect Obedience as the Condition of Life, none

none could be justified) and not on Faith in Christ. And this Thought will easily reconcile the seemingly different Accounts of the Apostles Principles in this Matter, and makes their Principles and Practices agree together, and both with the Design of the Law.



C H A P. XI.

The Gospel Revelation not contrary to our natural Notions of God.

I GO on now, according to my designed Method, to consider the last Difficulty mentioned, as to the Application of the internal Characters of a Revelation to the Gospel, *viz.*, Whether there be not some Parts of it not so agreeable to our natural Notions of God, or of his Laws, which our Reason discovers. Now, I am not sensible that there is any Thing of this Nature in the Gospel itself. For as to what some talk of the Doctrine of Christ's Satisfaction being contrary to every natural Notion we have of God's Goodness, they have received an abundant Confutation from *Grotius, Stillingfleet, Truman,*

Truman, Tillotson, Burnet, and all the excellent Writers against the *Socinians*. And as to the Eternity of Hell-Torments, the Arguments against 'em are wide of the Point, since they only shew that we don't see the Reasons which make 'em necessary ; not that there are none such ; and since what Punishments precisely shall be inflicted is not so much a Consideration of Justice as of Wisdom, as A-Bp. *Tillotson* has excellently shewn. The only Difficulty that I know in this whole Matter is this: *Christianity* is built on *Judaism*: If the Foundations of *Judaism* be not solid, *Christianity* falls to the Ground : But if there be any Thing in *Judaism* contrary to our natural Notions of God, or to the Law of Nature, it can't be supported — Now, the most plausible Things that have been urged on that Head are these : The *Polygamy* practised by the Patriarchs, and allowed by the *Jewish* Law ; *Abraham*'s Command to offer up his Son ; God's chusing, as it seems, arbitrarily, the *Jewish* Nation above others ; the whole Frame and Constitution of their Laws ; the Severities they were ordered to use towards the *Canaanites*. As to the first, several learned Men have endeavoured to clear it thus — *Polygamy* (say they) was never absolutely unlawful, tho' *Monogamy* was the more excellent Way ; more agreeable to the original

ginal Design of Marriage, and accordingly reviv'd by our Saviour. This, in the main, is true enough; but the Distinction seems not accurate. I should rather distinguish between the primary and secondary Law of Nature. The primary, Law of Nature is nothing but what our Reason teaches us to be the Will of God, from the immutable Relations and Circumstances of Things and Persons: The secondary from the mutable. Instances of the first are all natural Duties we owe to God, resulting from his immutable Relations to us, and the main Duty of universal Benevolence we owe our Neighbour; which results from the Nature of Man as a sociable Creature; and lastly, that Government of ourselves, which is necessary to our performing those Duties to God and our Neighbour. Of the latter are those that we properly call relative Duties, and, as I apprehend, the Law against Poligamy, which might not be in Force when the Circumstances of Mankind were different from what they are now, as before the World was Peopled; and might not be given the Jews, because such Restraint of their Liberty might make 'em wholly throw off the Yoke of God's Laws, and so run into the Idolatry of their neighbour Nations, and all the vile Practices that attended it. And the same may be said of the Case of incest, in the beginning of the World.

As to the second Difficulty, *viz. Abraham's Command to offer up his Son*, 'tis plain, there is nothing in the Thing itself contrary to the Law of Nature: For tho' we have not a Right to the Lives of one another, yet God has to the Lives of us all; and therefore we may justly execute his Order, in taking away the Life of our Neighbour; tho' we could not have done it of ourselves. The only difficulty is, how *Abraham* could be assured that this was a Revelation from God; when it seemed so contrary to his natural Notions of God; when it thwarted those Principles of Love and Tenderness to an Offspring, which were planted in him by God, for wise and great Reasons; and when the acting in such a manner seemed to be introducing Disorder and Confusion into the World, by teaching Men to break thro' their Natural Principles? Now, indeed, if this were the first Time of God's making a Revelation to him, it would be a very difficult Case; but as God had before reveal'd himself to him, and probably by some external Sign satisfied him that the Revelation came from him, he might be as sure, by rememb'ring what Impressi-
on on his Mind, &c. attended such a Sign, that God spake to him again, as we are that we speak to one another. Then, as
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for the thwarting our Natural Principles, there is no more Difficulty in this Case, than in God's commanding us to offer up our own Lives, the Love of which is as natural as of our Offsprings. And lastly, as to the Disorders this would bring into the World, that indeed would follow upon the Frequency of such Command, and on common Occasions, as in the other Instance of offering up our own Lives; but not upon one such extraordinary Command. And to compleat all, this was only a Tryal of *Abraham's* Obedience, to God; 'twas only God's putting a Difficulty in the way of his Obedience, for the Exercise and Improvement of his Virtue: God never design'd this Order should be executed, and he saw that it would not destroy his natural tenderness and love to his Child, but rather encrease it.

As to the 3d Difficulty, that vanishes of itself, when once there is a true state of the Matter given. The Case then is this: After the Flood the World soon grew corrupt, and was over-run with all manner of Wickedness, which at last had debauched all their Principles, and led 'em to the Worship of other Gods. Seeing this, God chose out *Abraham*, who was a virtuous, and well-dispos'd Person, made a particular Revelation of his Will to him, promised him a

numerous Posterity, and a peaceable Settlement in a rich and flourishing Country. Accordingly this Person grew into a Family, this Family into a Nation, and this Nation God selected to himself to be his peculiar People ; among whom his Worship should be kept up, whom he would govern, in an extraordinary and miraculous manner, to whom he would give Laws adapted to their Constitution, with Sanctions suitable to them ; among whom he would, in a peculiar manner, manifest his Presence, by visible Tokens and Symbols of it, and by uncommon Victories attending their Arms ; by which last the Knowledge of the true God would be carried amongst many Nations of the World, as well as by their Captivities, when for their Sins God gave 'em into the Hands of their Enemies. In fine, God always declares that he chose 'em for his People, not for their Deserts, but for the Virtues of their Ancestors, who were certainly fit objects of such a Favour. And since 'twas very fit and proper that God should, for the Reasons above-mention'd, select some one Nation to himself, in this manner, he might chuse that which to his Wisdom seemed best (which might direct to Reasons of Action that we are unacquainted with) when thereby he did no Injury to any other Nations, whom he had not

not left without Witness of his Goodness,
and for whom he had done what was sufficient to have led 'em to such Practices, as would have recommended 'em to some farther Degrees of his Favour.

As to the 4th Difficulty, that consists of two Parts, *viz.* 1. The whole Frame of the *Jewish* Law, which consists so much of seemingly insignificant Ceremonies, which prescribes so pompous a Way of Worship; and, 2. Some particular Parts of it, which seem to give Indulgences to Vice: As to Lust, witness the Law of Divorce: And to Revenge; witness the Law given 'em concerning the *Amalakites, Moabites, &c.* Now, as to the first Difficulty, it must be consider'd, that the *Jewish* was a Political Constitution: God governed them, for the most Part, in the Way of earthly Governours; accordingly his Laws generally reach'd only to the external Actions, and the Sanctions of 'em were temporal: But then there were some Precepts interspersed of an higher and more spiritual Nature, and these were afterwards more fully explain'd by the Prophets; and there was great Encouragement given, all along the *Jewish* Dispensation, to the Hopes of a future Life, which accordingly good Men took hold of. The *Jews* were extremely delighted with a pompous Way of Worship, and so much inclin'd to the Idolatry of their Neigh-

Neighbours, that they would infallibly have fallen into it, if some Condescension had not been made to their Infirmity. Then, in order to keep 'em from the Idolatries of the Nations round 'em, 'twas necessary they should be preserved a seperate People; and that was best done by some distinguishing Rites, Peculiarities in Eating, &c. 'Tis probable that many Rites were enjoin'd them in Opposition to particular Rites of their Heathen Neighbours, as Learned Men have shewn. In short, if we can't give a particular Account of all the *Jewish* Laws, 'tis no Wonder, when we don't throughly know their Genius, Constitution, the State of their Neighbour Nations, &c. As to the 2d Part of the Difficulty, 'twas fit that a Body of Laws should be given 'em, not the best in themselves, but the best fitted for that People. Now, if some Indulgence had not been given 'em, they would never have been kept in tolerable Order; but would have run out, not only into these, but much worse, Excesses. And the Severities, they were to shew to Idolaters, kept up their Horroure of that Vice. But this leads to the Consideration of the last Difficulty; which must be the Subject of the next Chapter.



C H A P. XII.

Of the Destruction of the CANAANITE Nations.

IN my last I endeavour'd to answer some of the most plausible Objections against the Matter of the Christian Revelation; and because I thought the Gospel itself furnished us with none considerable, I therefore consider'd what Objections there were of this Nature against the *Jewish* Dispensation, upon which Christianity is built. I have gone thro' all I mention'd, save one, *viz.* The Severity God used in the Destruction of the Seven *Canaanite* Nations, and his making the *Jews* the Executioners of his Wrath against 'em. Now, here it may be pleaded, That a Revelation from God should bear the Characters of that universal Goodness and Mercy, which are the acknowledg'd Perfections of the Divine Nature. That God governs the Moral World by steady and constant Laws, as he does the Natural, and that 'tis inconsistent with his Wisdom to break in upon 'em: That if he does it in one Instance,

Instance, he may do it in Two, or Two Thousand ; but, however, the doing it in one Instance would cause some Disorder in the World : That Miracles of themselves are not sufficient to establish a Revelation ; therefore, if any pretended Revelation contradicted the Law of Nature, that would be a stronger Argument against it, than Miracles could be for it : Lastly, That if such a Commission, as for one Nation to destroy so many others, that had done 'em no Injury, be allowed, no Objection drawn from Morality can be sufficient to disprove a Revelation ; for what may be said for this may in like Manner be said for a Command to kill our Sovereign or Father, to betray one's Friend or Country.— But to all this I answer :

1. That God never did, nor can, dispense with the Law of Nature ; for the Law of Reason must always oblige reasonable Beings ; but then he may alter the Circumstances in which Men were placed, and upon that an Action, that before was indifferent, or perhaps Sinful, may become a Duty. Thus, for Instance, tho' it be a Sin in me to take away the Life of one that has not injured me, because I have no Right to do it, yet upon God's Command I have Right, and ought to use it. And this is the Case in Hand. What creates a Difficulty here is only

only, that we conceive the Law of Nature as a Set of written Precepts, like the Decalogue ; whereas the Law of Nature is nothing but the Law of Reason, or whatever Reason teaches us to be the Will of God, from the Circumstances in which we are placed, and the Relations we bear to other Beings ; and as those Circumstances and Relations alter, so the very same Law will require us to act differently.

2. God may sometimes with very good Reason interpose, and execute Vengeance on a wicked Nation ; and this is very much for the Good of Mankind. And if he does this by the Ministry of another Nation, it will tend to give 'em a greater Abhorrence of the other's Crimes, and so be of good Use.

3. This can't tend to overthrow the Order of Societies, or destroy the Obligation of the social Virtues. If, indeed, God should continually thus interpose, and that not in the Case of Nations, but of particular Persons; it would be so. The whole World is obnoxious to the Divine Wrath, and, if punished according to their Deserts, must be destroyed, and so all Society be at an End : Or if God was pleased somewhat to mitigate the Rigour of his Laws, and preserve the Least-virtuous to be, from Time to Time, Executioners of his Wrath on the others, this would destroy all the Order of Societies, and

vacate all the Obligations to the social Virtues. It might then be, for Instance, a Duty for Princes, instead of protecting their Subjects, to kill 'em all as fast they could ; and so for Subjects, instead of paying due Allegiance to their Sovereign, to murder him on the first Opportunity : When a Man has obliged me, instead of returning the Favour, it might be my Duty to knock him on the Head, as soon as I met him : When I had promised to do a Man a Favour, it might be my Duty, instead of that, to take his Goods or his Life from him. But now none of these Consequences follow on the present Supposition. How does it follow, that, because God has, on an extraordinary Occasion, commissioned one Nation to take Vengeance on the Idolatry, and other Wickednesses of some other Nations, therefore the same Commission may be often pleaded, and that with Respect to particular Persons, and on no such extraordinary Occasion ? Does it follow that, because a continual, or a frequent Interposition of Providence is inconsistent with a State of Trial, with the Exercise of Virtue, with the Order of Societies, therefore, that one such Interposition is ? Or does it follow that, because the Inhabitants of a particular Country were under a Theocracy, and so had a Body of Laws given 'em from God, with temporal Sanctions annexed to

to 'em, which were executed (as under all Governments) when the Laws were broken, therefore Men might in that Country kill one another at Pleasure, &c? Or that Men in other Countries might execute any Punishments on others, as for the Breach of Divine Laws, when it appears not that they were under such Theocracy? Nay, when the contrary appears, and when it appears unreasonable to suppose, God should govern the World in that Manner? If indeed the Law of Nature were supposed to be changed in One Instance, it might as well be in a Thousand: But I have shewn here is no Alteration of the Law of Nature, no dispensing with it, no causing the Obligations of it to cease; but it remains in all its Parts in full Force, with respect to such Persons as have this Commission. Then as to the rest of the World, its Obligation is not at all weakned, except those Executions by Men of the Divine Law, be suppos'd to be frequent; which they are not. If then it be ask'd, where shall we stop? If one Nation in one Age may plead such a Commission, why not another in another Age, &c. ? I answer, let any Nation produce so good Evidence of a Divine Commission, as the *Jews* did, and then, not 'till then, they will deserve to be heard; but this has never been yet; which shews that

they have not been so frequent as to weaken the Order of Society. If it be said, that one such Commission does in some Measure weaken Society, I deny it, and have before prov'd that, on the contrary, it tends to the good of it. If lastly it be said, that upon our Supposition, no Objection drawn from Morality can be sufficient to disprove a Revelation, this is plainly a Mistake; for I have shewn, even as to the Instances here given, that there might be Reason from thence to reject a pretended Revelation, and yet not from our supposed Instance. If here should be a pretended Revelation, that should command us indifferently, and without any particular Reason, to put others to Death, as we met with 'em; Subjects without Provocation to rise up against their Sovereigns, &c. this would be a good Reason for rejecting it, because it necessarily destroys all the Order and the very Being of Societies: But it does not at all follow, that therefore God may not on a particular extraordinary Occasion, commission one Nation to be the Executioners of his Vengeance on others, for the open Breaches of known Laws, very much for the Good of Society; or that he may not, for wise Reasons, select a particular People to himself, and govern 'em in a visible Manner, and establish a Set of Laws amongst 'em, and

and then, that the Breaches of those Laws may not expose 'em to certain Punishments specified, which in some Cases may be executed by the Ministry of some of their Fellow-Subjects. The main Difficulty is, if God may give such a Commission to destroy a Nation, why not a particular Person? and if once, why not often? But now that does not follow, as I have shewn above. Indeed, if a Man were commanded by God, to put his Sovereign to Death, he ought to do it, and it wou'd in that Case be no Breach of the Law of Nature; but it does not therefore follow, that I have the same Reason to believe a Commission in that Case, as the other; especially, if it be a good Prince, if the Nation will suffer by his Loss; nay, if he be not a very bad Prince, bent on the Ruine of his People; for otherwise, by such Commission, the Order of Society is much disturb'd. The same may be said in the other Cases mention'd: And thus I have now, I hope, fully consider'd the Difficulty propos'd; and I have done it the more largely, because at first View it seems to carry something of a terrible Appearance, tho', I hope, a little acquaintance with it, has by this time shewn you, that it is very innocent. There is one Difficulty more, that is commonly urged on this Head, which, because it may be solved

in

in a few Words, I shall close this Paper with ; and that is the Case of the *Israelites* borrowing Goods of the *Egyptians*, by God's Order, so as never to repay. But all this depends on a false, or at least doubtful, Translation of the *Hebrew* ; for the litteral Rendring of the Words, *Ex. xii. 35, 36.* is, that *they asked them, and the Egyptians gave 'em at their Asking*, as all Learned Men know and acknowledge. And there is no Difficulty in supposing, that the *Egyptians* might freely part with their Goods, to 'em, in order to get rid of such troublesome Company, upon whose Account they had suffer'd so much. Befides that, 'tis expressly said, that *God gave 'em Favour in the Sight of the Egyptians*. But if you take it as it is in our Translation, the first Particular in Answer to the above-mention'd Difficulty, will be a full Answer to this ; so that I shall not need to trouble you any further on this Head.





C H A P. XIII.

Of M I R A C L E S.

I HAVE now done with the internal Evidence for Christianity : I come therefore to the External, *viz.* Miracles and Prophecies : And I begin with the First : Christianity is attended with such Miracles, as one might reasonably expect a Revelation to be attested by ; for (1.) The Works done in Behalf of it were not done once or twice only, in which Case a Cheat might well be suspected ; for a Man might take hold of some Advantages, as the Inadvertence of the Company, a convenient Place, &c. but they were often repeated : (2.) They were not of one or two Sorts only, in which Case a Person might suspect, that a Man had learnt a Way of performing some Tricks, but they were of all the Kinds almost that can be imagined. Now if a Man might have the Knack of doing some of these Things, yet not of doing all, if he might have an Art of curing some particular Distemper, yet not easily of curing all

all, and not only this, but casting out Devils, raising the Dead, &c. (3.) They were not trifling and ludicrous, but grave and serious, useful and beneficent, worthy therefore the wise and good Governor of the World: The only one that looks, either like ludicrous or hurtful, is that of sending the Devils into the Herd of Swine; but when one considers that hereby our Saviour discovered the Multitude, Malice and great Power of the Devils, when not restrained by God, and how many useful Thoughts that may suggest to us, the Difficulty vanishes, and Wisdom and Goodness appears in our Saviour's Action: (4.) They were not done in an ignorant Age and Country, but in one of great Knowledge and Improvements: The Arts and Sciences were at this Time carried to a great Height, and spread in most Parts of the *Roman* Empire; the *Jews* were much improved by their Commerce with the *Romans*; and after our Saviour's Death the Apostles carried the Gospel even to *Rome* itself, the Seat of Learning: (5.) They were not done in a Corner, but openly, and before Multitudes, sometimes many Thousands, that were not only the Spectators, but the Subjects of 'em; as when our Saviour fed 5000 with 5 Loaves and 2 Fishes: (6.) They were not done only before Friends, but before the bitterest Enemies; there were many of our Saviour's

Saviour's Miracles done before the Pharisees that sought his Life: Indeed Christ's Enemies were not the Witnesses of his Resurrection; but then even his Friends were incredulous before; they did not expect such a Thing, and were at last satisfied by the fullest Evidence: So that nothing can be objected to their Testimony, but what may to all Testimony whatever, *viz.* that 'tis not the highest Evidence Things are capable of; for since here is the Testimony of Men that had no Interest to deceive, and that could not well be deceived themselves, there is nothing to invalidate their Testimony. It would indeed be greater Evidence, if these Witnesses were all Enemies instead of Friends to Christ: But why should we stop there? It would still be greater Evidence to me, if I could see Christ myself; and then, at this Rate, we must be satisfied with nothing short of the Evidence of Sense; and in a little While we should soon spy something or other in that, short of absolute Certainty; and then at last we must come to this to expect the highest Evidence for every Thing: (7.) They were Works the most difficult to be conceived, and so difficult some of 'em that they had been reckoned impossible, even to the Divine Power; such as raising the Dead: And in this Instance we may observe, there is a particular Discovery of a

Divine Interposure ; for tho' it may not be above the Power of a Creature to make the humane Body fit to receive the Soul again, yet we can't suppose the departed Spirit sent down to reanimate it, but by a particular Permission of the Father of Spirits. (8.) There were no superior Works wrought in Opposition to 'em ; on the contrary when there ever was any Competition, Christianity always proved victorious ; as in the Case of *Philip*, and *Simon Magus*, *Acts* 8. (9.) To compleat all, they were such Works as could not be natural Effects, *i. e.* such Things as would happen according to the common Method of God's Government of the World. For 'tis certain when humane Bodies are laid in the Grave, they do not commonly rise up again, as Corn springs out of the Ground where 'twas sown. Neither could they be performed by the Art of Man : For whatever Art Men may have of curing Distempers by strange Means, yet surely not by no Means at all ; at a Distance ; meerly by a Word's speaking, &c. And tho' the Imagination may have great Effect in curing some Distempers, yet not chronical ones : Never was a Man born blind cured in that Way. Neither cou'd they be performed by Evil Spirits, because of the Contrariety of the Doctrine to their Tempers and Designs : And if it could possibly be supposed that good Spirits might assist

assist a Pretender to a Divine Commission, in Order to promote some good Design in the World, yet can't it be supposed God would suffer such a Thing to the unavoidable Deception of Mankind, and to the rendering it impossible for himself to give any Revelation to Mankind with sufficient Evidence.

The Miracles then of Christ, and the Apostles must be wrought, either mediately or immediately by God, to attest that Doctrine they pretended to bring from him. To this Argument of Miracles we may add that of Christ's Predictions concerning future Events. Now as the Force of that Argument lies here, *viz.* That such Things were predicted as could not have been guessed at from the Dispositions of Men, &c. but discover'd a Divine Interposure, so we must instance in some such. Our Saviour then predicted his own Resurrection, and how that discovered the Divine Interposure I have already shewn: He also foretold the Progress of his Religion in the World, its spreading soon over the whole *Roman Empire*, which, in the Circumstances in which it then was, could not have come to pass without the Divine Providence. That such a Religion as that of the Blessed *Jesus*, so contrary to the Humours, Vices, and Sentiments of Mankind, should, within one Age,

spread itself so far, not only without any humane Means, as Power, Policy, Wit, Learning, &c. but against all these, was wholly incredible, and, according to human Probability, could never have been supposed. If it be said that tho' these Things were wholly improbable, yet our Saviour might speak 'em at random, and they might afterwards happen to come to pass just as he had said ; I answer, any one but a Madman, when he threw out Prophecies at Random, wou'd put the Time of their Accomplishment a little farther off, and not speak of Things that were to happen within an Age, which, not falling out right, would crush his Religion before it could have taken any Head. Nothing now remains but to show how the ancient Prophecies of the *Messiah* agreed to our *Saviour*. His own Miracles and Predictions prove that he came from God : But in Order to prove that he was that particular Person, mark'd out in the *Jewish* Books, and described as sent on a particular Errand, an Agreement must be shown in the Circumstances of his Birth, Life, &c. to the Characters therein given of that Person ; especially when he actually appealed to 'em himself. Now the Characters of the *Messiah* in the *Old Testament* are such as these, *viz.* That he should be born a little before the *Jewish* Government was quite

quite dissolved, of the Tribe of *Judah*, of the Family of *David*, &c. all which were exactly fulfilled in *Jesus*, as may be seen in the History of the Gospels; the Authenticity of which shall be hereafter proved. The only Difficulty is about those Prophecies of the *Messiah* that have not been fulfilled; such as those that speak of all Nations being gathered to him; of *Israel's* being restored, and made happy under his Government; of the flourishing and abounding of Truth, Peace, and Goodness in the World at his coming. Now to this I answer, that there are plainly Two Comings of the *Messiah* mentioned; the one to suffer; the other to reign Gloriously; the one to destroy the Rebellious; the other to restore the obedient *Jews*.—That the *Messiah* is prophesied of as Suffering is plain from *Is.* 53, and *Dan.* 9. And some of the *Jews* have been so sensible of it, that therefore they have coined Two *Messiahs*; but the Truth is, that both the Suffering and the Glorious State are applied to one and the same Person; and he is first described as coming to Suffer, and then as advanced to his Glory. Now this gives a clear Account of the whole Matter.—The Prophecies relating to his First Coming to Suffer have been fulfilled: At the Time of this First Coming the City and Sanctuary were destroyed, as prophesied *Dan.* 9. and that

that in such a Manner, as seemed to discover the Providence of God engaged against the *Jewish* Nation. Now were vast Numbers of the *Jews*, who had all Opportunities for enquiring into the Truth of the Facts, convinced of the Divinity of *Jesus* Mission; which cou'd not have been, if his Pretensions had not been just; and this is an Argument, that the other Prophecies relating to their National Conversion and Restoration, will be fulfilled in Time.

Now were Multitudes of *Heathens*, of most Parts of the then known World, brought in; which, in the Way the Apostles made Converts, could not have been without Divine Assistance; and this is a sufficient Proof, that the Fulness of the *Gentiles* shall hereafter be brought in. We may easily suppose that the Prophecies relating to the Peace, Prosperity and Purity of the Church, shall be fulfilled, when that glorious Kingdom of the *Messiah* is set up, to the Time of which they are always supposed, in the Prophecies, to belong.

There are many wise and judicious Christians, that are for understanding the Prophecies generally in a Literal Sense, as well as the *Jews*; tho' both must allow that there are Figures used in some Expressions. Herein they both agree, that the *Messiah* is to reign gloriously over all Nations; that

that he is to deliver the *Jews*, and restore them to their own Land, and their former Priveliges ; that then the *Gentiles* also are to come into the Church, and Idolatry, Persecution, &c. are to be destroyed : That the *Messiah* will succeed to the Throne of his Father *David*, and reign over the whole House of *Israel*, 'till the End of all Things ; for that the *Jews* shall now revolt no more, but be an obedient People, and so ever in the Favour of God : And this I apprehend is the main Doctrine of the *Old Testament*, and with this exactly agrees the *New* ; see particularly *Rom.* 11. *Luk.* 1, 32, 33.

The only material Difference between the *Jews* and Us seems to lie here, *viz.* That the *Jews* are willing to understand some few Passages in a more litteral Sense ; but now provided the main Scheme of the Prophecies be understood litterally, I don't see why a particular Expression, or Two, may not be taken Figuratively. This is certain, the wiser Sort of the *Jews* themselves are forced to recur to Figures, in order to explain some Passages ; and why then may not the *Christians* in order to explain others ? I should think no understanding Person would conclude, that the Prophecies were not fulfilled, if the Things above-mentioned were accomplished, tho' he did not see the *Messiah*, in human Form, sitting on that Throne
which

which was formerly *David's* at *Jerusalem*, riding out in solemn Pomp to subdue his Enemies, and deliver his People; any more than tho' he did not see *Jerusalem* rebuilt with precious Stones, or *Mount Sion* rising up in I know not what strange Manner, and over-topping all other Mountains. Some Passages must be interpreted Figuratively, as particularly those which speak of all Nations coming up to *Jerusalem* to worship, which implies a Contradiction in the Nature of the Thing: So that upon the whole, since many of the Characters of the *Messiah* do exactly suit him, and can suit none else; since the Time is now elapsed, and none had any tolerable Pretensions to be the *Messiah* but *Jesus of Nazareth*, who appeared within that Time; and since there are plainly Two Comings of the *Messiah* prophesied of, and those Things which have not been fulfilled in him are plainly described to relate to the *Messiah's* Second Coming, which is justly supposed to be yet future; and since the main Doctrine concerning the *Messiah*, taught in the *Old and New Testament*, and believed by the *Jews* on one Hand, and the ancient *Christians* on the other, is the very same, we may safely conclude, notwithstanding any pretended Difficulties, that he is the *Messiah* prophesied of.

C H A P.

C H A P. XIV.

Truth of CHRISTIANITY from the Concessions of its Adversaries.

IN Order to establish the Truth of the Facts on which Christianity is built, we may argue (1.) From the Concessions of the Adversaries : (2.) From those Facts which have preserved the Memory of Christianity in the World : (3.) From the Genuineness and Authenticalness of the Histories, in which these Things are contained.

(1.) Then from the Concessions of the Adversaries. Now, that there was such a Person as *Jesus of Nazareth*; that he lived in the Time of *Augustus* in *Judea*; that he taught a good Moral Doctrine; pretended at least, to work Miracles; had some Followers in his Life-Time; that he gave out, that after he was put to Death, he would rise again from the Dead; that he was accordingly put to Death, whilst *Pontius Pilate* was Governor of *Judea*; that his Followers, notwithstanding, adhered to his Doctrine, and pretended, that

their Master was risen from the Dead, and that they had seen him, and had the fullest Proofs of his being still alive ; that they published this Story immediately upon the very Place where 'twas said to be done, before those that had the strongest Inclination, and all Advantages to have detected the Cheat ; that upon this they were severely punished ; that notwithstanding they continued to bear their Testimony to their Master, from whom, if not alive, they could receive no Advantage ; that they were unanimous in their Testimony ; that notwithstanding the utmost Severity used, others continually came into the Belief of this Doctrine, meerly on the Credit of this Story, and the Pretense these Persons made to work Miracles ; that these also were constant and unanimous in their Testimony to what they had seen ; that in a few Years, by this Means, this Doctrine was spread and gained Credit, not only in *Judea*, but over all the *Roman* Empire, and was professed by vast Numbers even at *Rome* itself : All this is granted by all sober and considerate Adversaries, and the most Part of it particularly related by *Tacitus* and *Pliny*.

Now, from hence we may argue the Truth of the main Facts on which Christianity is built ; for if the Tendency of the Doctrine

Doctrine were so pure and holy, and he pretended to attest it by many wonderful Works, done in the Sight of all, and on this, some, even in his Life-Time, that lived upon the Spot, and had full Advantages for inquiring into the Truth of Facts, came into the Belief and Profession of it, tho' they knew they exposed themselves to the Wrath of the Government thereby; if further he was put to Death for these Pretensions of his, when he might easily have saved his Life by quitting 'em, and yet could never propose any worldly Views from 'em: If before this he declared both to his Disciples and to others, that he should rise again within such a Time. — If his Disciples gave out, that this was done. — If they said, they not only saw him, but conversed along with him, eat and drank with him; that one of 'em felt the very Place of his Wounds. — If they had no Interest to serve by this Story, since they knew the Government was against 'em. — If they could have no remaining Affection to their dead Master, when they knew he had miserably deceived 'em, and exposed their Lives for nothing. — If their Interests were all the other Way, since they knew what Hardships and Dangers they must expose themselves to, by charging home such a Crime, as the Murder of their *Messiah*, on

the Rulers, which they certainly did, by saying, that *Jesus* was risen from the dead. — If notwithstanding they boldly and openly did this. — If when they were not only a little moderately chastized, for that might easily be born thro' *Obstinacy, &c.* but threatned even with Death itself, they never flinched. — Nay, if they bore Death with the greatest Readiness, rather than quit, not a *Speculative Opinion*, which they might be *perswaded of*, but a *Practical one*, which, if it were an Error, they could not but know to be so; and this when, tho' on the one Hand, they were exposed to such Dangers for maintaining it, yet on the other Hand they could never reasonably propose to serve any *Worldly Interest* by it. — If even at their Deaths no Disagreement in their Testimony could ever be produced. — If at that Time the Cheat was not detected, as it might easily have been by those then in Power, and so the Religion been crushed at once. — But on the contrary, if it spread even among those who, living on the Spot, had the best Opportunities of knowing the Truth of Facts, and who had many National Prejudices against *Jesus* and his Religion; and who knew what Dangers they exposed themselves to by embracing it. — If these chief Disciples of *Christ* went abroad into other Parts of the

the World, even to *Rome* itself, the Seat of Learning and Empire, and there made the same Pretensions; and also pretended to confirm what they said by Miracles of their own, and yet met with like Success. — If by this Means, without any human Policy, Learning or Power, that Religion very soon spread every where, far and wide, notwithstanding *the continued and extreme* Persecutions of its Adherents, who could never be supposed to be so strangely attached to Men, they knew (or might easily have known) to be Impostors, as to suffer the most cruel Deaths for 'em, when the betraying 'em would generally have set 'em free. — If such a Doctrine as *Christ's*, so contrary to the Humours, Vices, and Opinions of Mankind, pretended to be confirmed by such Works as it was, and *certainly supported by nothing else*, did so generally prevail: If all these Things, I say, be so, then it must follow, that *Jesus of Nazareth* did come from God, and this is now plain from Concessions of Adversaries.

What we are next to inquire into is, the Tradition of this Doctrine to us; for without that the other will be of no Use to us. Now, here 'tis plain, there has always been a Succession of Men, that have professed this Doctrine: Tho' there have been Differences

ferences amongst the Men of this Religion, in different Ages, and even in the same Age, yet in some of the main Points they have all agreed. There has been one Day in the Week continually observed, to celebrate the Worship said to be instituted by *Christ*, and to instruct Men in his Religion, for which Purpose there has been a particular Order of Men set apart. The *Two Sacraments* have preserved the most material Parts of Christianity: In *Baptism* Persons in a solemn Manner took the Obligations of Christianity on themselves; and in the Primitive Church those, who were converted from *Heathenism*, were, before *Baptism*, particularly and for a considerable Time together, instructed in Christianity, and at last made a solemn Profession of its Belief: In the *Lord's Supper* there is a Commemoration made of what *Christ* has done and suffered for us, particularly of his Death, the Design of it, and the Benefits accruing to us from thence. Some of the main Parts of *Christian Doctrine*, as of *Christ's Death*, *Resurrection*, &c. have been commemorated on particular Days: But the best and surest Way of delivering down this Doctrine to Posterity is by Writing: Now, that we have authentick Accounts of this Doctrine, *V. G.* in the Four Gospels, will appear, if these Things

Things be considered. (1.) That these Books are certainly genuine, and belong to those Men whose Names they bear: For this there is uncontrolled Tradition, into which at last all the Evidence for such Things must be resolved. There are no Marks of Spuriousness in the Books: No Chronology, &c. from whence one shou'd guesse 'em to be of a later Date. They have been quoted all along as theirs by vast Numbers of Persons in all Ages, and even by *Julian*, &c. (2.) If they were Genuine, they must be true Histories. For then they were published in that very Age when the Things were said to be done, and when, if false, they might easily have been detected, and so the Religion would infallibly have been crushed. Then, they were writ by those, who talked not of Things done at a Distance from 'em, or many Ages past, but of what they were Eye-witnesses of, or had from Eye-witnesses; and by Men, who had no Interest to serve by such Stories, nay, who hazarded all their Interests to propagate 'em.

Then they agree in many Parts with other authentick Histories; as in particular in the main Story that there was such a Person as *Jesus of Nazareth*, that had a great many Followers, and was put to Death under *Pontius Pilate*, during *Tiberius's*

berius's Reign, which *Tacitus* relates: And in other Particulars they agree very well with *Josephus*. Thus they mention the several successive Governours in *Judea*, just as *Josephus* does; as *Herod the Great*, *Archelaus*, *Herod Agrippa*, &c. and the *High Priests* among the *Jews*, as *Annas* and *Caiphas*. *Josephus* mentions *John the Baptist*, describes his Office, and gives him an excellent Character; and gives an Account of *Herod's* putting him to Death: Concerning the secret Springs of this Transaction he does indeed differ a little from the *Evangelists*; but that is nothing but what is common among all Historians, see *Antiq.* Chp. xviii. Chp. vi. He gives an Account of the putting *James* the Brother of our *Lord* to Death, whom he describes as a most excellent Person C. xx. C. viii. He describes *Herod Agrippa's* Death at *Cæsarea*, in a very extraordinary Manner, after his blasphemiously claiming Divine Honours, by a violent Pain in his Bowels, (which St. *Luke* more particularly describes by his being consumed of Worms *Acts* xii. xxiii.) *Jos. Antiq.* C. xix. C. viii. *Josephus* particularly describes that Tax, under *Cyrenius* Governor of *Syria*, which is mentioned on Occasion of the Enrolment, made by *Augustus*, at the Time of our *Saviour's* Birth. *L.* 2, *S.* 2, *Com. Acts* v. 31.

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Concerning the Difference between *Josephus* and the *Evangelists* about *Herodias*, see Dr. *Whitby's* Note on *Mat.* xiv. v. 3. I have not mentioned the disputed Passage in *Josephus*, relating to our *Saviour*, because I am not satisfied in its Genuinness; but the noblest Attestation of *Josephus* to the Truth of the Gospels is, the Account he gives, in his *Wars of the Jews*, of the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, so exactly agreeable to our *Saviour's* Prophecy. Then some of the main Facts have been granted by its greatest Enemies, as the Miracles; even by the *Jews* themselves, who have attributed 'em to *Magick*, to the Power of the Name *Jehovah*, &c. Then there have been no Authentick Counter Histories ever published, nor so much as any Traditions preserved of the Detection of the Cheat. The Accounts the *Jews* have published, besides that they have granted some of the main Facts, as the Miracles, have been very ridiculous, and even inconsistent with themselves: The *Jews* have no Traditions of the Cheat of *Christ's* Miracles: On the contrary they own 'em. They do not indeed own his Resurrection; but then they are able to give us no Accounts of the Detection of the Cheat. How easy had it been for 'em, who had all the Power in their own Hands, to have produc'd the

O dead

dead Body, even tho' it had been stolen by his Disciples, which they ridiculously report from Witnesses that were asleep? And if this had been done, how could it ever have been forgotten? Would there not have been Histories of this published in that Age, to confront our Histories? Would not the *Pharisees* have spread about the true Story, and proved the *Apostles* Liers to all the World? Would the Memory of this so remarkable a Thing be ever lost? Would not the *Jews* always recur to it in their Disputes with the *Christians*? Must not *Christianity*, upon this, infallibly have been crushed, supported by no human Means, having Authority engaged against it, and the Facts, which should bear up its Credit, detected of Cheat? If *Christ's* Body had actually been produced, and so the Fact of his Resurrection detected of Falshood; how cou'd the *Jews* have depended on the Story, of his Disciples stealing away his Body: Or if there were no such Report among 'em, how could the Gospel-History, which mentions it, have gained any Credit? If it be said, that these Facts have been detected, and Accounts of the Detection have been published, but that these have been burnt by the *Christians*, particularly the Writings of *Celsus*, *Porphyry*, &c. To this I answer,

swer, (1.) That tho' these Histories have been lost, yet the Tradition would never be lost among the inveterate Enemies of *Christianity*. (2.) The Writings of such Men, as are mentioned, come too late to detect the Cheat: This should have been done by the *Jews* of that Age; and then it might have been easily done. (3.) The *Christians* could not destroy their Enemies Books, 'till the *Roman* Emperor was become *Christian*; but long before that Time, if *Christianity* had been an Imposture, it would have been detected. (4.) These Writings are not wholly lost: Fragments are preserved of 'em, in the Books of those *Christians*, who answered 'em. And from thence we learn, that they were far from so much as pretending to have detected the Cheat of the main Facts of *Christianity*. *Celsus V. G.* tho' he does not believe *Christ* wrought by a Divine Power; nay, tho' like an *Epicuran*, he seems not to suppose any Thing super-natural in his Works, yet he could not wholly deny the Facts themselves. And tho' one may make great Allowances for the Representations of an Adversary; yet one can't suppose such a Man as *Origen* would have wrote a whole Book, that should have quite mistaken the State of the Case; and so miserably have mis-represented his Adversary, by making

him always grant the Fact of Miracles, but deny the Reasoning from 'em, as would have exposed the Cause of *Christianity*.

(5.) If the Writings of such as *Celsus* had been burnt by the *Christians*, under *Constantine*, &c. yet when *Julian* came to the Empire, he would have made Inquiries into those Things; he would soon have learn'd how the Gospel had been detected of Cheat, and so would have fixed an everlasting Reproach on it, and hindred it from ever rising again.

(3.) These Histories have been delivered down pure and uncorrupt to us: For they were from the Beginning in every one's Hand, and quoted frequently, and the Quotations very well agree in the maine with our present Copies. We have very few Differences, of considerable Moment, amongst the Copies; much fewer, I believe, than in any ancient Book of equal Bulk: These Books were read in *Justin Martyr's* Time every *Lord's Day*; they were soon dispersed into several Parts of the World, and translated into different Languages; they were preserved as sacred Books by vast Numbers of People, in most Parts of the then known World; they were appealed to by Men of different Parties, Interests, and Opinions, who, no doubt, watch'd one another, and

and wou'd prevent any Corruptions; when any have endeavoured to corrupt the Copies that were in their own Hands, they were complained of by others; and there was, for a long while, no Temporal Power of any Sort of *Christians* over others, by which Means they might have burnt the others Copies, and delivered down their own corrupted ones. The World did not come into the Church 'till 300 Years after *Christ*, and by that Time there were so many Copies dispersed into all Parts of the World, and so many Translations, that there could be no general Corruption; and besides, if there had been, there would have been a Tradition preserved of it by the opposite Party; and then, in their Turn, when they prevailed, they would set all right again. Thus in Case the *Arians* should, under an Emperor of their Stamp, have endeavour'd to corrupt the Copies, the other Party would still, very probably, preserve some Copies uncorrupt; or, at least, when it came to their Turn to reign, they would have corrected 'em again. Then, these Books were continually quoted for Proofs of Doctrine, and by Men of different Opinions, against one another. Great Numbers of Men thought their eternal Interests depended on the Doctrines of these Books.

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Then the Accounts of Doctrines in these Books agree exactly to the Idea we should naturally form of such a Religion, so propagated as that was, and which we receive from any other ancient Books. So that we have much greater Evidence of the Incorruptness of these Books than we can possibly have for other Books, which were not from the Beginning in so many Hands; Copies of which were not dispersed into so many Parts of the World; which it was not the Concern of many People to preserve pure; from which there have not been made so many Quotations, which have not been translated into different Languages, &c. And yet we receive these Books without Scruple; as, in the main, pure and uncorrupt; and they would be reckoned over nice, that should pretend to call their Authentickness in Question. There are no Books of whose Purity we can be so well assured, as the Statute Books; because they have been in so many Hands, continually quoted, Mens Interests have depended on the Preservation of 'em, they have been from Time to Time appealed to, for deciding Controversies, relating to the most important worldly Concerns.

But then these Books have the Advantage of 'em, in that they have been in more

more Hands, more Copies taken of 'em, which we can compare, more Quotations from 'em, translated into more Languages, it has been a more general Concern of Mankind to preserve 'em pure; not the Interest of one Nation only, but of all Mankind have been concern'd in their Preservation: Men of different Nations, that could not cabal together, have agreed in their Authenticalness; and in these Respects 'tis evident these Books have much the Advantage of the Books of the *Old Testament*, of whose Incorruptness, in the main, we have yet no good Reason to doubt.

Nothing now remains but to show how the common People are capable of this Evidence for the Facts of *Christianity*. 'Tis plain they are capable of all the first Part of the Argument; for they can argue from the *known* Concessions of the Adversaries as well as others. Then they may have some Notion of *Christianity*, from those Institutions which have, in some Measure, preserved it. As to the Books, which convey these Things to 'em, particularly the Four Gospels; they are delivered down to 'em, as belonging to particular Men in a particular Age and Nation; and they have no Reason to doubt their Authenticalness, any more than of *Cæsar's* Commentaries;

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nor indeed so much, because, as they contain Matters of more universal Concern, 'tis reasonably to be supposed, they have been more narrowly watched. They can see the Contents of the Books agree with their natural Idea of such a Religion as the *Christian* is pretended to be. They can't, indeed, be satisfied from the First Hands, that these Books have been quoted in most Ages; but then they may be very well assured of this, by the concurrent Testimony of Men of different Parties, Interests, &c. and some of whom can have no Motive in this Point to deceive 'em; and they may be also shown the Quotations in Books, that have been translated into their own Mother Tongue. Then, when they are satisfied of the Genuiness of the Books, they are capable of all the Reasoning from thence, to prove 'em true Histories.

Lastly, As to the Tradition of 'em to us, pure and uncorrupt, they are capable of seeing the Evidence for that, from the Facts of their being so often quoted, continually read in Churches, translated into different Languages, &c. and that these Facts are true, they have great Reason to believe from the concurrent Testimony of all learned Men, even Adversaries to *Christianity*; just as they believe there is such a Place as *Rome*, *Paris*, &c. which, perhaps, they never saw, from universal Report.



CHAP. XV.

An Examination of the Grounds and Reasons, &c.

I Come now to the last Part of the Argument, *viz.* the Examination of the Grounds and Reasons &c. Now here we must first recollect what has been already done of this Nature. I have already proved that *Jesus* has shown himself to be a Prophet come from God, by the most wonderful Works, and a most holy Doctrine; and to be that Person which was particularly promised the *Jews*, by answering the Characters given of him in their Divine Books; I have shown that this is the true Foot on which *Christianity* ought to be placed, and that therefore this Author's Grounds are false: I have also shewn, that no Arguments, drawn from supposed false Quotations of the Apostles, *directly* affects *Christianity*, because it does not affect the Truth of the Facts on which it is built; and that it *no way* affects it, but as it may be supposed to show, that the Apostles were not sufficiently instructed in the *Christian Doctrine*,

Doctrine, or honest eno' to deliver it down pure and incorrupt to succeeding Ages. Now, if I can show that nothing that has been advanced about the Prophecies affects the Credibility of the Apostles Testimony, concerning the Doctrine of *Christ*, I have effectually gained my Point. Let us then consider this Matter a little. We have already seen the Truth of the Gospel History, and from thence very strong Evidence to convince us, not only that *Jesus* was a Prophet, come from God; but also, that he was that particular Person prophecied of in the *Jewish* inspired Books; and that he brought a Revelation from God, that was to be of Use to all succeeding Ages of the World. From hence alone we might collect, that the Providence of God would be concern'd to deliver down this Revelation pure and incorrupt to Posterity. Besides this, *Jesus* chose a Number of his Disciples, and promised to give 'em his Spirit, to bring what he had said to their Remembrance, and to lead 'em into all further Truth, necessary for the establishing his Religion. And that they actually receiy'd this Spirit, as a Fulfilment of this Promise, they proved by the many Miracles they wrought; some of 'em greater than what *Jesus* had done; particularly, the speaking with

with diverse Tongues. But then, on the other Hand, 'tis argued, that as this Revelation was designed to be of continued and perpetual Use, so if there were not due Care taken for the delivering it down to Posterity pure and incorrupt, 'tis plain 'twas no Revelation from God at all; and that there was not such Care taken, is plain from the false Quotations of Prophecies the Apostles made, and their weak Arguments from such Quotations; by which it appears, that they were not qualified for such a Work, and that they cannot be depended on. Now, in Order to make this a conclusive Argument against *Christianity*, these Three Things must be done. (1.) It must be shown, that the Quotations depended on, are designed Quotations of Prophecies, and, as such, used for Arguments. (2.) That if they are, such Arguments are not strictly conclusive. (3.) That in Case some of 'em should not hold to be strictly conclusive, yet, that they are not good Arguments *ad homines*; or that if they are good Arguments *ad homines*, tho' they be not strictly conclusive, that they will not save the Credit of the Apostles Testimony. If then, on the contrary, it appears, that many of these may not be Quotations of Prophecies at all, that some of those which are may be strictly conclusive,

and that others at least may be good Arguments *ad homines*, and being such will salve the Honour of the Gospel, all this Author's Argument falls to the Ground. I have, in this State of the Case, put the Matter at the lowest, and supposed only a bare Possibility, that these Things should be so: For that is enough to make out my Argument, since the Proof lies wholly on the other Side. I have proved my Point, by positive Evidence, without the Help of any Arguments drawn from these disputed Quotations: These must therefore now be consider'd as so many Objections, and the Objector is obliged to make out his own Argument, and not we to prove the contrary: 'Tis eno' therefore, that we prove, that these Things may poslibly be so as we suppose. If besides that, we prove sometimes that very probably, and at other Times even certainly, that they are so, that is all *ex abundanti*. To begin then with the first of these Propositions, *viz.* That many of these may not be designed as Quotations of Prophecies at all, nor used for Arguments. And herē I must first observe, that there is a great deal of Difference between a Proof urged against an Adversary, as those we have mentioned in the *Acts*, and a Remark made by an Evangelist in the Course of the History, which 'tis

'tis not certain he designed as a Proof; nothing can be more natural than to suppose, the Evangelists might observe, as they went along, any remarkable Agreement between Occurrences which they mention, and ancient Facts or Prophecies mentioned in the *Old Testament*.

To make Way for which Observation, I shall consider the following Things. (1.) That there is nothing more common than for Words, by Length of Time, to lose their primary Signification, and to sink down to a much lower Sense than what they were at first used in: This has been observed by learned Men, with Respect to the Word Prophecy, and many others. Thus therefore it might be in the present Case; and therefore the fulfilling of Prophecies might, in some Cases, signify no more, than that an Event exactly answer'd to what was prophesied of. (2.) This, in Fact, is the Case with Respect to one of the Expressions used by the Evangelists, *viz.* *Then was fulfilled*; for sometimes it refers to what was no Prophecy at all of any Thing, as *Mat.* ii. 17, 18. See also *Mat.* xiii. 14. *Marc.* vii. 6. Now, as the Evangelists were certainly sober and consistent Writers, so 'tis at least most probable, they did not design these as Quotations of Prophecies. (3.) There is nothing

nothing more common, either in the *Sep-tuagint*, or the *New Testament*, than by διπλως, &c. to express only the Event, and not the Design; thus, *Ps.* xxxi. 4. *Jo.* xii. 37, 39. *Ro.* i. 20. iii. 20. *Jo.* xv. 25. And then *that it might be fulfilled* will be no more than, then it was fulfilled: And 'tis to be observed, that one of the Places referr'd to, viz. *Jo.* xii. 31, 39. speaks directly of Prophecy; and, if one were to judge by the meer Form of the Words, would seem to be as express a Quotation of a Prophecy, designed to be fulfilled by such an Event, as could be: And yet, when one considers the Place, it can't be so, without supposing, that God designed the *Jews* should reject the *Mef-siah*, and ordered Matters to that End; which we cant easily suppose to be the Sense of the Writers of the *New Testament*, when 'tis so contrary to those Accounts of God, which they give us in other Places. (4.) Since the Expression, *that it might be fulfilled*, will admit of so low a Sense, we are next to consider how 'tis actually used. Now 'tis used in many Cases, where I think, except we have a meaner Opinion of the Writers, than what as meer Historians they deserve, we cannot well suppose they designed a Quotation of a Prophecy, as designedly fulfilled

fulfilled in a particular Event: For in some of the Places, the Passages referr'd to are Matters of History, and not so much as any Prophecies at all; So *Mat.* ii. 15. xiii. 34, 35. *Jo.* xix. 36. And here I desire it may be observed, that the Argument to prove that the Expression, *that it might be fulfilled*, is to be taken in that low Sense, is the same exactly as was used before, to prove the same of *then it was fulfilled*. If the Argument therefore be conclusive in one Case, it must be in the other. (5.) There is an easy Account to be given of this Matter, *viz.* How such an Expression as *that it might be fulfilled*, should lose its ancient Force: And how the Evangelists should use such an Expression, only to denote a Similitude of an Event to one anciently predicted. We find Expressions much like this, in Use, even amongst us now. When any Thing happens exactly answerable to what is spoken of in Scripture, we commonly say, *That now is such a Scripture fulfilled*: And Religious Persons amongst us do very often make such Applications of Scripture. And this might more easily be supposed of the *Jews*, who had such a prodigious Veneration for their Scriptures; and therefore were ready to apply 'em on all Occasions; and who, besides, had a great Notion of mystical Interpretations. I will

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not say, that the mystical Interpretations of Prophecies were so ancient ; I own I see nothing of it in the *Chaldee Paraphrases*, nor in *Josephus* : But 'tis certain, from *Philo the Jew*, and from the Apostles Way of reasoning to the Hebrews, and from *Barnabas Epistle*, that they had such a Way of interpreting Histories, (and some of the Evangelist's Quotations are from Histories, as *Mat.* ii. 15. *Jo.* xix. 36.) Now, it must be remembred, that the Evangelists some of 'em were *Jews themselves*, and therefore would be naturally led to make such Applications of Scripture, especially when they writ partly for the Use of the *Jews*, who would expect to see such Things in their History ; and possibly, for this Reason, we meet with most of these Things in the Gospel of *Mathew*, which the Ancients tell us was originally writ in Hebrew for the Use of the *Jews*. (6.) If it were granted, that *ινα διπλωσις &c.* always signify the Intention, and not only the Event, yet the main Controversy turns on the Sense of the Expression *then was fulfilled* ; for if that be capable of a loose Sense, all the Argument falls to the Ground ; for then it will be no more than saying, That God order'd such a Thing to be done, in Order to answer such an Event, or agree to such a Passage

Passage in the Life of some Person under the Old Dispensation, &c. I know but one Thing that can be objected to this Account; and that is, that such Observations of the Evangelists would seem trifling; but then, besides what has been already hinted of the Expediency of such Observations, in Compliance with a National Custom, some of these Passages referr'd to might be real Prophecies of such an Event mentioned, and then the taking Notice of 'em would be of great Consequence. All that I contend for is only, that this can't be concluded from the mere Force of the Expressions, *then was fulfilled*, or *that it might be fulfilled*; and that therefore *many* of those Places may only contain Allusions to Passages in the *Old Testament*. Now these Observations will carry us thro' some of the greatest Difficulties in this Matter, which generally lie in the Gospels; particularly, they will fully clear that in *Mat. ii. 15. Out of Egypt have I called my Son*: And I humbly propose it to the Consideration of the Learned, whether this be not the best Way of solving the Difficulty of *Mat. i. 22, 23.* For tho' Mr. *Whiston* has shown very well, that what is said in *15th and 16 V. of Is. vii.* may refer to *Isaiah's Child*, that he had then with him, yet there is one Difficulty that still

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remains,

remains, *viz.* How the Birth of a Child, several Hundred Years to come, could be a Sign to the Men of *Judah* then present.

To answer, that since the *Messiah* was to be of the House of *David*, a Promise of his coming secur'd 'em that they should not be destroyed, does not fully reach the Point; since this was no Security to 'em, but from the Veracity of God: And the same Veracity of God would equally secure 'em by a bare Promise of their Deliverance, without the Promise of the Birth of such a Child at all: Indeed it may be said, that it was a farther Confirmation of their Faith, which was in Danger to be shaken by so great Fears as they were at present under, to refer 'em to ancient Promises which they firmly believed; and that this was done here, by referring 'em to the Promise of a great Person, of the Tribe of *Judah*, and Seed of *David*, (under which Characters the *Messiah* was represented long before this Prophecy) born of a Virgin, or the Seed of a Woman alone, as seems to be intimated in the first Promise, by whom God would work great Deliverance for 'em, and discover his peculiar and extraordinary Presence with 'em, which again was the ancient Character of the *Messiah*.

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But then the Difficulty returns how this could be a Sign: A Sign in Scripture signifies something sensible; something that is done before Mens Eyes, to confirm 'em in the Belief, either of something past, as that God has sent a particular Person, so *Ex. iii. 12.* or else of something to come: But a Parallel Instance to this, where something to be done at the Distance of many Hundred Years is made a Sign; or where a past Promise, not yet fulfilled, is made the Sign of the Fulfilment of another Promise, there is none, I believe, in all the Bible. According to this Interpretation, the Conception of the Virgin was not the Sign, so much as the ancient Promise of such Conception, which seems not to agree so exactly with the Letter of the Text.

After all, I would not be understood by any Thing of this to determine positively, that this is not a Prophecy of the *Messiah*. There are great Difficulties in the *Jewish* Interpretation; as that it seems unaccountable, how a young Woman's having a Child, in an ordinary Way, should be a Sign, or Wonder from God; that the Words in *V. 15.* seem to refer to *Shearjasbub*, whom the Prophet was ordered to bring with him for that very Purpose, as is probable; and that there is another Son men-

tioned in the 8th Chap. by a Name distinct from both the Virgin's Son, and the Prophet's in this Chapter, before which Child was able to speak plain, which would be about the Time the other, *Shearjashab*, was come to Years of Discretion, the Thing the Prophet was speaking of was to come to pass: But tho' the Birth of the Virgin's Son be given as a Sign, that the House of *David* should not be destroyed; yet there is nothing said of the Departure of the Two Kings, before that Child should come to such an Age. All therefore that I design, by what has been said, is to show, that in Case this should really not be a Prophecy of the *Messiah*, it does not affect the Cause of *Christianity*, since 'tis not certain the Evangelist quotes it as such. Upon the whole Matter, one of these Things, I think, must be allowed; either that an ancient Promise not fulfilled, is said to be a Sign of something that was to be done for God's People; in which Sense the Word *Sign* is never used in any other Place of Scripture; or else, it must be said, that this whole Passage is out of it's true Order in the Prophets, contrary to the Faith of all ancient Copies and Versions, and to the Readings of the most ancient Fathers; or else, lastly, it must be said, that the Word *Sign* is taken in its common Sense,

Sense, and that it was wrought at that Time, when the young Woman, the Prophet took to him Chap. viii. brought forth a Son. I leave every one to his own Judgment; 'tis enough that, upon the present Supposition, I have secured the Cause of *Christianity* against the *Deists*. There is another Way that some very learned Men have taken to clear this, and other like Difficulties, and that is by recurring to a double Sense of the Prophecies; but then, 'tis plain, that Prophecies so interpreted do afford no Arguments for any Cause; since we cannot certainly discover 'em to have such a double Sense, 'till this be shewn by other inspired Men, whose Authority is then supposed, whereas 'tis the very Thing in Question. And 'tis observable, that Christ and the Apostles refer to Prophecies, to support their Authority, and do not by their Authority, otherwise proved, support a certain Sense of the Prophecies. *Christ* sends the *Jews*, who denied his Authority, to *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and says, *That if they believed 'em, they would believe him*. The Apostles argue with Unbelievers, from the Prophecies, that *Jesus* was the *Messiah*, or that Great Person therein spoken of; and commend those, who not taking what they said on Trust, searched the *Scriptures*, to see whether these Things were

were so. In the Way of Argument therefore 'tis plain this Notion is perfectly useless. If a Prophecy was certainly designed to foretelone Event, which actually came to pass accordingly, how shall we prove that it had a Reference to any other?

We may indeed fancy, that some Expressions are too high, and must look beyond that Event, &c. but that Difficulty will easily be solved, by our Unacquaintedness with the Idioms of the Language, by the imperfect Accounts we have of the Event, &c. So that these double Senses of Prophecies can never be proved, so as to be used as Arguments, and so are perfectly useless; then they bring in a Way of interpreting Scripture quite contrary to that of all other Authors: And there is no Need of any such Supposition, since that, which we now go upon, solves all the same Difficulties every whit as well; and then avoids all the Inconveniencies which the other is pressed with. In our Way the *Old Testament* is to be interpretted in one single Sense, as all other Books; and the *New Testament* quotes the *Old*, in the Way that was commonly then in Use among the *Jews*. From what has been said, we may easily clear many of our Saviour's Quotations of the *Old Testament*, concerning himself; for oftentimes they seem

to be only Allusions. Thus, when he says, *Mat. xxi. 42.* Did ye never read in the Scripture, the Stone which the Builders rejected, the same is become the Head of the Corner; 'tis, as if our Saviour had said, *Tho' you now reject and despise me, that is no Argument of my being forsaken of God:* 'Tis no uncommon Thing with God to design those for the Heads of his People, who were most despised by the Great Masters in *Israel:* And so it happen'd to *David* formerly.

Indeed sometimes our *Saviour* seems to quote some Passages as Prophecies of himself, particularly *Mat. iv.* where he refers to several Characters of the *Messiah*; some of which indeed may not refer to any Prophecy, because they imply a miraculous Power, which was always the Character of a Prophet of God; but the last, *viz.* *That the Poor have the Gospel preached to 'em* can be the Character of the *Messiah*, no otherwise, than as it is the Fulfilment of a Prophecy. Now the Prophecy referr'd to, seems to be that in *Is. lxii. 1.* which seems plainly to refer to the *Messiah*; as the Context, both before and after, concerning the great Restoration of the *Jews*, would easily lead one to imagine. The only Difficulty is, how the *Messiah* should be introduced in the Prophecy, as speaking concerning

cerning himself ; but to this we have a parallel Instance *Chap. xlix.* where there are some Passages that, I think, can well be applied to no other ; see *Ver. 5, 6.* This same Prophecy is also referr'd to by our *Saviour, Luk. iv. 21.* where he tells 'em, *That this Day was this Scripture fulfilled in their Ears ;* by which, I don't think, 'tis necessary to understand, that then the Prophecy had it's full Accomplishment (for it seems rather originally to refer to *Christ's Second Coming*) but that the Prophecy referr'd to him, and exactly suited these Actions which he had lately performed.

And thus, I have now finished the first Proposition. I come to the Second, *viz.* That there are some of the Apostles Quotations, that may be Quotations of Prophecies, and their Arguments from which may be conclusive. Now here I must observe, (1.) That the properest Place to look for these is in the *Acts* ; for there only we have the Apostles Discourses with *Infidels*, and the Arguments they used to convince 'em set down. (2.) That since it has been already proved, that no Arguments from any double Sense of the Prophecies can be conclusive, it must be shown, that the Apostles always argued, with Unbelievers, from the single Sense of 'em ; and this may be easily done. Thus, *Acts ii. St. Peter argues at large*

large from *Ps.* xvi. and endeavours to show that the Words he quotes from it, did not at all belong to *David*, and could belong to none but the *Messiah*: From v. 15, to 31. the Apostle says, 'That *David* spake these Things not at all of himself, but of the *Messiah*; that being a Prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an Oath to him, that of the Fruit of his Loins, he would raise up *Christ* to sit on his Throne, he seeing this before, spake of the Resurrection of *Christ*.' Here you may observe that, quite contrary to the Way of the *Moderns*, the *Apostle* does not make the *Psalman* speak of himself; but in such a Manner, as if his Words have a further Reference in the Intention of the *Holy Ghost*, even directly and designedly of the *Messiah*. And thus he argues from *Ps.* cx. v. 34. See also *Acts*, viii. v. 34, 35. *Acts*, xiii. 33, 34, 35. I shall now set my self to examine this Matter particularly, and show from the *Acts*, where the Apostles Discourses are recorded, and their Arguments with *Infidels* set down; that some of these *must* be, and that all *may* be conclusive, for any Thing, is proved to the contrary.

The First is that, *Acts*, ii. quoted by St. *Peter* from *Joel*, ii. 28. concerning the *Effusion of the Spirit in the latter Days*: Now, here 'tis to be observed, the Apostle only

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says, That such *Effusion of the Spirit*, as they saw, was what *Joel* had prophesied of: 'Tis not necessary to suppose, that he meant, as if that Prophecy had a peculiar Reference to that very Time: The Prophet seems rather to have a peculiar Reference to the remarkable *Effusion of the Spirit*, at the Time when *Israel* shall be gathered to him. *Com. Ezek.* xxxix. 29. And thus this will be very well connected with the following Chapter; many Parts of which seem to have a very plain Reference to the Time of the great Restoration of the *Jews*: See particularly, *v. 2. Zach.* xiv. 4. iii. 12. The Wonders said to be done here in the Heavens, are mentioned again *Chap. iii. 15.* on Occasion of the Deliverance God would work for his People from their Enemies. And the great and terrible Day of the Lord, seems to be the Time when God would reckon with the Nations for their Cruelty to his People: *Chap. iii. v. 2. Deut. xxxii. 36. Zech. xiv. 12.* and when he would punish those amongst the *Jews* that were disobedient: *Ps. l. If. lxvi. Mat. C. iii. and iv.* There seems to be an Instance parallel to this, *Mat. iii. 3.* concerning *John*, where 'tis said, that he is the Person spoken of, *If. xxxx. 3.* and so he might; and yet, what is there said of him may have a peculiar

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iliar Reference to the Time of his Second Coming, before the Second Coming of Christ; if he shall, as seems not improbable, be then also Christ's Harbinger. See also *Marc.* i. 2. *Compare Mal.* iii. 1, 2, 3, 4. throughout.

The next Quotation, in the same Chapter, is from *Ps.* xvi. 10. That this Place is rightly applied to the *Messiah* by the Apostle, and that his Argument from thence is good, will appear, if we consider these Things: (1.) 'Tis plain the Expressions, in the Psalm, are not to be understood figuratively, as if he meant no more, than that God would not leave him in his Troubles; but would deliver him; for v. 9. when he had spoken of the Joy, which he had in his Mind at the Sense of God's Presence with him to support, comfort and reward him, he brings in also a very beautiful Figure; his Flesh or Body as rejoicing too, from a View that it should be delivered from the Grave, and that even there it should not see Corruption. (2.) The Psalmist cannot mean, that tho' his Body should be corrupted in the Grave; yet it should not always lie rotting there, but should at last be raised up: For the Phrase won't bear that Signification. The Words in the *Hebrew*, signify, *Thou wilt not leave my Soul or Life, in Hades or the Grave, neither wilt thou*

thou give thy Holy One to see Corruption: And so the LXX. and to the same Effect all the other Versions. Now to see Corruption is an *Hebraism*, and signifies to be corrupted, as to see Life is to live, to see Death is to die. Now, as it would be improper to say, a Person shall never see Death, because, he shan't be always under the Power of it: So it would be improper to say, a Person shan't see Corruption, because he shan't be always in that State. The Scripture Expression, for not being always in a State a of Death is, & μὴ θεωρήσῃ θανάτον εἰς τὸν αἰώνα. *He shall not see Death for ever.* Jo. viii. 51. Com. Jo. xi. 25, 26. The Hebrew Word here translated *Corruption*, and so the Greek Word that answers it in the LXX. signifies either *Corruption* and *Rotteness*, or, the *Pit of Corruption*, into which Bodies are thrown to corrupt. Now it can't signify the latter here, because, whether the Psalmist speaks in his own Name, or the *Messiah's*, they were both thrown into the *Pit of Corruption*; and this he had expressed before, when he said, *God would not leave his Life in the Grave.* It must therefore here signify the former; and then it agrees only to the *Messiah*, as the Apostle reasons. It should seem the Psalmist refers this particularly to his Body, and does not mean only in general, that when

when he died, he should not be utterly lost: And being referr'd, particularly to the Body, I think, it can signify but one of the two Things mentioned above. The Corruption or Destruction of the Body, is it's turning to Dust and Putrefaction; and because this is, in the common Course of Nature, soon done when it is laid in the Grave, therefore the Receptacle of the Body, after Death, is called by the same Name of *Corruption* or *Destruction*. In short, the Psalmist in other Places, expresses his being destroy'd, by going into the *Pit of Destruction*, in which Bodies are *corrupted* and *destroyed*; and yet here he supposes, he should descend into the *Pit*, (which he calls *Hades*) and yet should not be *corrupted* or *destroyed*. See *Psal. xxx. 9. Psal. ix. 15, 35. lv. 23. (3.)* There is no Difficulty in supposing the whole *Psalm* belongs to the *Messiah*, since there is nothing in it but what will very well suit him: And as the *Messiah* was a *Jew* born, he might very well express himself, as he does, *v. 4, 5, 6.* concerning his Adherence to the God of *Israel*, in Opposition to all the Gods of the Neighbour Nations; and the Satisfaction he had in having him for his Portion, and having his Lot cast amongst his peculiar People. And so we may suppose the whole *Psalm*, as spoken

spoken by the *Messiah*; and there seem to be other Instances like this; as *Ps. xxii.* which is exactly fitted to the *Messiah* in his Sufferings; and some Parts of it can't suit *David*, taken in their litteral Sense; and there are some Parts of it, which plainly refer to some higher Concerns, than *David's* Deliverance from his Troubles; see *v. 27.* and as there are some Parts of it which litterally can't belong to *David*, so there are none but what will suit the *Messiah*. The *2d. Psalm*, in all it's Parts, can suit none but the *Messiah*, and there is no single Part of it, but what exactly agrees to him. And then it may well be supposed to be framed by the *Holy Ghost*, with a View to the Observations which *Christ's* Disciples would make on his Treatment, and so be fitted for their Use: And accordingly it was, in Fact, afterwards used in this Manner by the Apostles. *Psalm lxxiv.* is fitted to the State of the *Jewish* Church, after the Destruction of the *Romans*, and formed in the Manner of a Prayer, of the Church to God in such Circumstances; for that it does not refer to the Time of the *Babylonish* Captivity is plain, because, 'tis said, there was no Prophet amongst 'em; whereas, during all the Time of the Captivity, they had a Succession of Prophets; and 'tis

'tis said, there was none knew how long their Miseries would last, which could not be true if applied to that Captivity ; for God had expressly told 'em, it should last but for 70 Years. There is no Time after this, that these Words can, with any Reason, be supposed to refer to : For in the Time of *Antiochus Epiphanes*, there was nothing of that Destruction of their Places of Worship, which is here so lively described.

The cii. *Psalm* seems to be much of the same Nature, as would appear, if we had Time to compare the seyeral Parts of it, with what is said in the Prophecies, concerning the Restoration of the *Jews*. See also, *Ps. l. Is. xlix. C. liii. i. lxi. i.* I would only observe farther under this Head, that St. *Paul* seems to refer to this Prophecy, that the *Messiah* should not see Corruption, when he says, *That he was raised the Third Day according to the Scriptures. Com. Jo. xi. 39.*

The next Quotation is produced by the same Apostle, in the same Chapter, from *Ps. cx.* Now, that that *Psalm* refers to the *Messiah* is plain. 'Tis ascribed to *David*, as the Author; and he was taken for it's Author by the *Jews* in our Saviours Time, as is plain from his Application of it. Now, *David* was an absolute Prince.

Who

Who then could be his Lord but the *Messiah*? There was none among the *Jews* like *Melchizedeck*, both King and Priest; much less appointed a perpetual Priest, when under the Law, there was but one Order of Priests in all, and the Priesthood in that Order went by Succession from Father to Son. But it will more clearly appear that this Psalm belongs to the *Messiah*, if the several Parts of it be compared with other plain Prophecies of him: *Com. Part. v. 2.* with *Is. ii. 3.* xxxix. 20. *v. 5. 6.* with *Ps. ii. ix.* And now we may easily see the Force of the Apostle's reasoning from it. *David is not ascended into the Heavens: His Sepulcher is with us 'till this Day*, as he said just before, *v. 29.* Whereas the Person he is here speaking of, *was ascended into the Heavens, and had sat down on the Right Hand of God, and was invested with full Power and Authority under him*, as *Christ* had discovered that he *was, by the Spirit he had poured out on his Disciples*, mentioned, *v. 33.*

The next Quotation, *Acts*, iii. 22. is from *Deut. xviii. 15, 18, 19.* The Arguments that are used by *Stillingfleet, &c.* to prove that that Place refers to a Succession of Prophets in the *Jewish* Church, do seem to show thus much, that that Place ought not to be urged by us *now*, that do not

not, perhaps, exactly know wherein the whole Force of the Argument lies, as *strictly demonstrative*; but this does not concern me, who have never used it as such: I am only concerned with it, as 'tis turned into an Objection against the *Christians*; and therefore, all that I am bound to do, is to show, that the Context may be cleared, and a fair natural Sense given of the Words on the Apostle's Supposition; and so, that his Argument, at least, might be conclusive, if we can't now certainly discover *how it must* have been said. If, besides that, any Probability be offer'd to show the true Sense of the Words, that is all *ex abundanti*. *Moses* is here cautioning 'em against going to Diviners, &c. after the Manner of the *Heathens* about 'em. Now, 'twas a very good Argument against this, for him to intimate to 'em, what a clear Revelation God had made of his Will to 'em, already by himself; and that he would raise up another such *one* afterwards, by whom he would take Care to reveal to 'em, all that 'twas further convenient for 'em to know; and to which Revelation they might have Recourse on all Occasions. If it be said, That this was no Way to prevent their running after Diviners; that nothing would do that but a Succession of Prophets, to whom

they might, in every Age, on all Occasions, have Recourse instead of *Heathen* Diviners; I *answer*: A standing Revelation, which should declare to 'em, even concerning the future State of their Nation, whatever was fit for 'em to know, would be of constant and perpetual Use. But a constant and uninterrupted Succession of Prophets, 'tis plain from the Event, God did not design should be in the *Jewish* Church. The former therefore seems to be rather a more effectual Argument, especially when 'tis consider'd, that such clear Revelations, as God made 'em by *Moses*, discover'd what peculiar Regard God shew'd 'em, and how safely therefore they might depend on him alone for Instruction, in whatever was necessary for 'em to know: And this Argument would hold in full Force, thro' all successive Ages of the *Jewish* Church; whereas the other would lose it's Force, whenever the Succession of Prophets was broken. As to the Connection, with v. 20. and so on to the End, that is easy enough thus: I have mentioned this great Prophet; but, let me give you a Caution in the mean Time, concerning others that may arise with a Pretence of the Spirit of Prophecy amongst you, and how you are to judge of them, &c. Or thus, *Such a Great Prophet shall arise*

arise; and now, if, as is natural, any one shall falsely pretend to be he, thus you are to discover him. Dr. *Stillingfleet* says, 'That if we don't understand this Place of a Succession of Prophets, we shall find no Mention of 'em in all the Law of *Moses*, which is not probable. But now, besides that there is here an Intimation of a Succession of ordinary Prophets in the *Jewish* Church, tho' not constant and uninterrupted, even upon our Interpretation, in the first Way of making out the Connection just mentioned (For if between *Moses* and this great *Prophet*, there were no other true *Prophets* to arise, to what End should he lay down Rules to judge of 'em) besides this, I say, there is a clear Place of it, *Num.* xli. 18.

Thus, I think, it has been fully shown, that the Words may be interpreted as they are by the Apostle; nay, that their Connection with the Context is clearer that Way. Now let us see what Probabilities there are, for that Interpretation. (1.) Then there is the strictest and most natural Sense of the Word *Prophet*, to denote a single Person, as 'tis used just after. (2.) 'Tis expressly said, There was no other *Prophet* like to *Moses*, not only for the Greatness of the Signs, by which his Mission was confirmed, but also for the Clearness

of his Revelation. *Deut.* xxxiv. 10, 11. *Numb.* xii. 6, 7, 8. The assuring 'em therefore of the coming of another such Prophet amongst 'em, would be greater Satisfaction to 'em, and the strongst Argument to persuade 'em not to run after other Pretences of a Revelation. (3.) This Promise, of raising up such a Prophet like to *Moses*, is said to be made first to *Moses*, upon the Desire the People expressed, that God would not thus speak to 'em immediately himself, when he was about to reveal his Will to 'em: Upon which he appointed *Moses* to be a sort of Mediator between himself and them; with him he conversed, as it were, familiarly, and to him delivered a Body of Laws for the People to observe, and by him clearly revealed his Will to 'em. There was no Succession of such Prophets as then. The after Prophets were not Law-givers, but Interpreters of the Law; and God did not converse with 'em in so free and familiar a Manner. But one such Person besides, in these Respects like to *Moses*, God promised he would raise up; and this fully answered their Request: For that now for the Future, whenever God was pleased to make a Revelation of his Will to 'em, he would do it not immediately, and in so terrible a Manner as at present; but by a Man like them-

themselves, one raised up from their own Nation. (4.) The *Chaldee Paraphrase* seems to take the Word *Prophet* for a Single Person, and not a Succession of Men. (5.) The *Jews*, in our *Saviour's Time*, seem to have understood this of *one single Person*, and from thence to have concluded, that when the *Messiah* came, one of the old Prophets was to be raisd up to be his Attendant. *Jo. i. 21. Mat. xvi. 14. Luk. ix. 19.*

The next Argument used to prove *Jesus* the *Messiah*, is from *Is. 53*. Related *Acts*, viii. This Prophecy begins somewhat abruptly at *v. 13* of *52d. Chap.* from whence to the End is described, in short, both the *Messiah's Suffering* and exalted State: And both these the Prophet pursues in this *liii. Chapter*. He first describes his low and suffering State from *v. 2.* to *10.* and from thence to the End of the *Chapter*, his Glorious and exalted State. The *Jews* have been very much puzzled with this *Chapter*, as giving a Description of the *Messiah* contrary to their Notions. Some have supposed, that the Prophet describes the Sufferings of God's People *Israel*: But how *Israel* could be said to be smitten for the Transgressions of *Israel*, I can't conceive. 'Tis very remarkable, that the most considerable of the Modern *Jews*, have

have interpreted the latter Part of the former *Chapter* to the *Messiah*, tho' they have applied this *Chapter* to others, only to serve an *Hypothesis*; when 'tis clear, that they both describe the same Person, when the Descriptions are so exactly alike, and when the Two Accounts are so nearly connected together. The *Chaldee* Paraphrase refers the latter Part of the lii. *Chapter* directly to the *Messiah*; but very ridiculously refers Part of the liii. *Chapter* to the *Messiah*, and Part to the People of *Israel*; applying often Part of a Verse to the *Messiah*, and Part to the People of *Israel*; plainly, because some Part of that *Chapter* bore too hard on the *Jewish* Nation of the *Messiah*; and yet very unaccountably refers the last *Verse*, which speaks of *his delivering his Soul to Death*, wholly to him. *Grotius* has of late interpreted that *Chapter* of *Jeremiah*, but there are many Parts which can't at all suite him. See particularly v. 5, 6, 8, 12.

*Act*s, xiii. 23. and in several other Places, the Prophecy, concerning the *Messiah*'s being of the Seed of *David*, is referr'd to: And here, because there is a considerable Difficulty, because of Two different Promises that were made to *David*; the one relating to *Solomon* and his Posterity; the other, to the establishing his Kingdom in the

the *Messiah*, 'twill be convenient to have all the Places, relating to this Matter, before our Eyes. See then relating to *Solomon*. (1) *Kings*, ii. 4. *Chap.* vi. 12, 13. *Chap.* viii. 15, 21. *I. Chr.* xxii 7. 11. *Chap.* xxviii. 6, 7. 2 *Chron.* vi. 16. *Chap.* vii. 17. *Psal.* cxxxii. 12. See relating to the *Messiah*, 2 *Sam.* vii. 1 *Chron.* xvii. v. 11. *Psal.* lxxxix. 19.

See this Promise, relating to the *Messiah*, afterwards referr'd to, *Is.* ix. 7. *Chap.* lv. 3. *Ezek.* xxxvii. 24. *Hos.* iii. 5. From all which Places compar'd, 'tis plain, there are Two different Promises made; the one to *Nathan*, the other to *David* immediately; the one Absolute, the other Conditional; the one relating to latter Times, when *Israel* should never be remov'd out of their Country; the other to ancienter Times, when, 'tis supposed, they might, nay, intimated they should, for their Sins; the one referring to a particular *Son of David*, viz. *Soloman*, that was to be raised to the Throne in *David's* Life-Time, as accordingly he actually was; the other to one that was to be of his Son's, and to be raised to it after his Death, and then be established in God's House and Kingdom for ever. The great Difficulty here is, that *Solomon* seems to confound

these

these Two Promises. 1 *Kings*, viii. 15. xx. *Compare* ii. *Sam.* vii. 7.

But now, supposing this were true, that would never prove, these two different Promises to be one Promise; but only, that *Solomon* did not know them to relate to different Things: But because this is improbable, since *David* certainly knew it, and therefore probably Communicated this Knowledge to *Solomon*, let us examine that Matter a little.

That, that is hear akin with that mentioned, 2 *Sam.* 7. is the general Introduction to it, v. 16. Now, as these two Promises were very near akin, made on much the same Occasion, relating to much the same Matter, *viz.* the Establishing of *David's* Throne; as the first Occasion of God's making any Promise to *David*, of this kind, at all, was the thoughts he had of Building an House for God, which was what *Solomon* had then in his Eye; it was very proper he should begin his Account, with the first Occasion of God's making a Promise to *David*: But then, afterwards, v. 17. *Compare* v. 17. with *Chron.* i. 22. 7. he begins as it were a new, and gives a particular Account of the Promise made to *David*, concerning his Son, who was very soon to Build him an House. And 'tis observable, that c. v. Where *Solomon* gives

gives an Account of the same Matter; he gives another Reason, for *David's* being excused from building the House, which is not mentioned at all 2 *Sam.* vii. 1. *Chron.* xvii. *viz.* his unfitness, by reason of his many Wars; but is mentioned when the other Promise is made, 2 *Chron.* xxii. 8, 9. in *Jer.* c. xxxiii. from v. 17. to the End. It must be owned, the perpetuity of *David's* Kingdom seems to be put on another foot, *viz.* the Succession of Princes in his Line; but then we must understand this, so as to be agreeable to other Places, which expressly make the Promise of the perpetuity of *David's* Kingdom in that way, Conditional; and the only absolute Promise of that kind refers to the *Messiah*, with whom the departing Scepter of *Judah* is to be lodged; *Gen.* xix. 10. and who is to Reign over the House of *Israel* for ever: *Is.* ix. 7. *Com.* *Jer.* xxxiii. 17, 18. with *Ps.* cxii. 11, 12, 16, 17. One would be apt to think also at first sight, that the *Psalmist*, in *Ps.* lxxxix. understood the Promise of the Perpetuity of *David's* Kingdom, to refer to a perpetual Succession of Princes in his Line; but tho' that be indeed a great Difficulty, yet it does not concern our present Case: For however the *Psalmist* be supposed to have understood that Matter, yet since, by the Account he gives, v. 10. it appears, that

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Promise of a Perpetual Kingdom to King *David* was Absolute, whereas it is Evident, the Promise of a Succession of Princes in his Life was Conditional; there must be, besides the Promise which regarded *Solomon* and his Posterity, another which refers to the *Messiah*, which is all I am concerned to prove.

The next Quotation is, from *Ps.* ii. 7. *Thou art my Son, this Day have I begotten Thee*; which the Apostle, *Act*s xiii. 33. Applies to the Resurrection of the *Messiah* from the Dead, when he was begotten again to a new Life; declared publickly to be the Son of God, and entred on his Inheritance as such. That the Apostles is a natural Interpretation of the Words, I believe will not be disputed, when it is once shewn, that that *Psalm* refers to the *Messiah*: Now that it does, we have this Evidence; the whole exactly suits him, and there are some parts which can suit no other; particularly, *v. 8, 12.*

The next Quotation is in *Act*s, xiii. 34. from *Is.* iv. 3. to prove, that the *Messiah* was never to return again to see Corruption. The Argument seems to be this; God promised the *Jews* he would make an Everlasting Covenant with them, (i. e. a Covenant he would never break, that he would always be their God, and they should be

be his People : *Jer. 35. from. v. 35, to 38. Ezek. xxxvii. 23.) even the sure Mercies of David*, i. e. the *Messiah*, who was to reign over them for ever ; *Ezek. xxxvii. 25.* and therefore could not return again to see Corruption. That this Argument is good, every one must see, if that Chapter refers to the *Messiah* : Now, that it does, we have these probable Proofs, (1.) The Contents of two, and part of three preceding Chapters, (2.) The Words which immediately follow those quoted by the Apostle, *viz.* those *v. 4. Behold I have given him*, i. e. Most probably *David*, or the *Messiah*, mention'd just before, for a *Witness to the People, a Leader and Commander to the People* : Which is an Exact Character of the *Messiah*.

Acts xxvi. 23. St. *Paul* refers to Prophecies, in which it was declared, that the *Messiah* should suffer ; but first, that he should be raised from the Dead, and should shew Light to the People, and the Gentiles. For the first I have Considered them already : For the second, they come to what I have already Considered ; for the Apostle seems to refer to the Prophecies of the *Messiah's* not seeing Corruption, and so being the first that was raised from the Dead, so as not to Die again ; and for the last, that he should shew Light, or bring a clear Reve-

lation of God's Will, not only to the People of the Jews, but to the Gentiles also; that is, the General Current of the Prophecies.

And thus I have, I hope, fully prov'd the Second Proposition, *viz.* That many, I believe I may now add all the Arguments urged by the Apostles, against Infidels, *may*, and that some of 'em *must* be conclusive. I come now to the Third and Last Proposition, *viz.* That even, tho' we should suppose some of the Apostles Arguments not Conclusive, yet the Consequence would not be, that Christianity was an Imposture: It can never be prov'd, that the Apostles used Inconclusive Arguments, when they knew 'em to be such. The utmost then, that can be concluded, from the Use of such Arguments, is, their want of Knowledge: But then, how does this affect the Cause of Christianity? This shows, indeed, they were mistaken in some Things; but does it shew they were mistaken, as to the Doctrines or Duties of Christianity; and so could not transmit 'em to us? Suppose, they have interpret'd a Place in the Old Testament Wrong, this only shews the Spirit had not reveal'd the Sense of it to 'em; and that when left to themselves, they were not the best Criticks: But does this shew they did not know the Doctrines of Christ, when

by

by their Miracles they Evidenced they had the Spirit of Christ for this Purpose? And thus I have now gone thro' what I proposed, and have made out the Propositions, I thought necessary, in Order to destroy the Force of the Arguments made use of in the Grounds, &c. My Inquires have confined me to the *Acts*, because I proposed, only to Consider the Arguments urged by the Apostles, against the Infidels. I don't pretend to be able to give a clear Account of all the Arguments used in the Epistles; but shall conclude this Discourse with Two or Three hints, which I hope will Obviate any Objections from thence, against the Christian Religion.

1. Then I observe, we are to view these in a very different Light, from those recorded in the *Acts*. The One were urged to Infidels, the other to Believers; the one were urged to prove Jesus the true *Messiah*, the other to prove some other Point, perhaps relating to the *Messiah*, as that he was Higher than the *Angels*, &c. We are to consider then, before we come to read the Epistles, that they were not Writ for the Conviction of Unbelievers: The Miracles and Holy Doctrines of Christ, appealed to in the *Gospels* and *Acts*, did effectually prove him to be sent of God; and the Prophecies recorded to be accomplished, did prove him to

to be that Particular Person, that 'twas promised should come at that Time.

Further, the Miracles which the Apostles themselves wrought in Christ's Name, did prove, not only that Jesus was Exalted to the right Hand of God, and so had poured out these Gifts on 'em ; but also, that they were his Ambassadors, Commissioned in an Extraordinary manner, to deliver his Will to Mankind.

In the former case the Apostles proved from the Prophecies, that Jesus was the true *Messiah*, and appealed to those Men, for the Justice of their Arguements, that did not believe their Authority. But here they spoke to Men that were convinc'd of all this, and with whom their Authority was already established.

In the other, case the Apostles supposed, that the Men, with whom they had to do, might easily see the passages referred to, did belong to the *Messiah*, and were fulfilled in Jesus ; if they did not see this, they did not expect their assent to what they Taught : Here their Authority was nothing, because not yet proved ; the Men were to be governed, only by the intrinsick Evidence of things : But now, in the other Case, it was enough, if those they had to do with did not see the Contrary ; their Authority (already Established) might convince them, that that

that was the Sense of a Place in Old Testament which they would not otherwise have thought to be so.

2. The Miracles the Apostles wrought in Christ's Name, did prove them to be sent of him, to deliver to Mankind that Revelation he brought from God; because this the Apostles asserted of themselves, and to prove this, wrought those Miracles; but then those Miracles don't prove (because never brought to prove) that they were absolutely inspired in every thing, v. g. The Miracles St. *Paul* wrought, prove, that what he delivers as the Doctrines of Christ, he received from him; but they don't prove that whatever he asserts, when he does not vouch Christ's Authority for it, nor seem in the least to intimate that it came from him, was in like manner a Revelation from him.

3. The Miracles the Apostles wrought, prov'd them infallible, as to those things which related to their Office, but not as to other things; Christ promised the Apostles he would send his Spirit, to bring all things he had said to their Remembrance, and to lead them into all those truths, which were necessary, for the Establishing his Religion in the World. Thus, it was necessary, that St. *John*, who was to relate so many discourses of our Saviour, in another

ther Language, than what he delivered them, and many of which he did not at first understand, should have a particular inspiration for this: But, it was not therefore necessary, he should have the same sort of inspiration, for every Minute Circumstance of the History.

4. It does not seem necessary, in Order to the discharge of the Apostolical Office, that all the Arguments they use should be inspired. The Reason is plain; the Business of the Apostolical Office, was, to deliver down the Revelation of Christ, pure, and uncorrupt: It was necessary, therefore, they should be inspired as to the Doctrine of Christ. As to the Proof of it, *when known to be his*, Christ's own Miracles Established that; and that *it was his*, the Apostles Miracles, *in his Name*, fully proved. If now the Apostles, after this, used other Arguments, it was in Condescension to those, with whom they had to do; and with this view, Arguments *ad Homines*, might be more suitable, than those *ad rem*: And for this Reason, the Holy Spirit might leave the Apostles under a Mistake, as to the force of some Arguments.

The use to be made of this Observation, is, that when at any time we can't see an Argument of the Apostles to be strictly Conclusive, yet we should consider, whether

ther it might not be a Good Argument, *ad homines*, and if it be, that will effectually save the Credit of the Gospel : Such an Argument, *ad homines*, seems to be the Allegory, *Gal. 4.* Not as tho' the *Jews* had any such particular Allegory, but only they were used to argue in such a manner ; and so an Allegory from the Old Testament, handsomly framed, and exactly answering in all its parts, would be a convincing Argument to them : See also *Gal. iii. 16. &c.*

5. Before we pass any Judgment in this Matter, we should be first sure, that those we fancy to be used as Arguments by the Apostles, are designed as such, and not as meer allusions and illustrations : Thus it is plain, when St. *Paul* quotes those Words of the 19th *Psalm*, *Their Sound went into all the Earth, and their Words to the End of the World*, which are spoken of the Heavens, and applies them to the Apostles Preaching ; he designed no Argument at all, but only to express his Sense in Scripture Language ; and whether that may not be the Case in some other instances, where Passages of the Old Testament are brought in, just in the same Manner, I leave to be considered. I have already shewn, that the Phrase *Then was fulfilled*, is used sometimes, when only an allusion is designed ; and the same may easily

be proved of the Phrase, *As it is written* with which the Quotations in the Epistles are often ushered in.

Now, this notion will give a clear Account of some of the greatest difficulties, Thus, *Rom.* ix. v. 25, 26. where the Apostle quotes from *Hosea*, and applies to the *Gentiles*, what he had spoken of the *Jewish* Nation, received to God's Favour again, after they had been forsaken by him: And thus, v. 27, 28. what *Isaiah* speaks of the small remains of the *Jewish* Nation, which were preserved in his Days, the Apostle applies to the small Number of Converts among the the *Jews* to Christianity: And in like manner, he quotes *Isaiah* again, v. 29. If there be any Argument in the Apostles quotations here, it must be only a General one; as thus.

God, I say, will call the *Gentiles* also, as well as the *Jews*; and this is no uncommon Thing with God, to chuse those for his People, that before were at a distance from him; for this *Hosea* testifis, &c. And tho' the greater part of the *Jews* be now rejected, yet that also is no uncommon thing with God; for in *Isaiah*'s time, tho' the whole Body of the *Israelites* were a vast Number, yet, but a small Remnants was deliver'd.

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See instances of Quotations, by way of Allusion, or Illustration: *Rom.* 10. 11. 8. 8, 36. *Heb.* 8. 5.

And thus, I have now finished my design. I do not intend to enter further into the Epistles, but leave that to those worthy Persons, who design to treat largely of this Argument. 'Tis enough for my Purpose to have pointed out some few things, to help Common Readers, to see through the fallacy of the Arguments advanced by the Author of the *Grounds*, &c.



APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Concerning MIRACLES.

I Design in this Discourse, to shew more fully the Nature of Miracles. Before we can settle that matter on sure Grounds, we must examine the several Accounts that have been given of Miracles, by learned Men. (1) Then some define a Miracle to be a Work, which in *the Judgment of the Spectator* is Supernatural: But if this be a true Account of a Miracle, some of the most common Effects of Nature and Art would be Miracles, to great numbers of Men. But it is impossible, a divine Revelation should be built on such Works as these; for, however ignorant Men may be satisfied for a Time, yet, every new discovery in Philosophy would shake the Credit of a Revelation no better attested: Besides, where is the Evidence of the Divinity of a Doctrine, from such works as these? How does it follow, that because such

such a Thing happened, which I cannot account for, therefore, that Person who appeals to such an Event, for the truth of his Mission, does really bring a divine Revelation ? how do I know that the Doctrine came from God, except there be, some way or other, an interposition of divine Providence in its behalf ? And how does that appear in the present Case ? Yes, you'll say, God would not permit such things to happen, if he did not approve the Doctrine. But how know you that ? If the Doctrine be unworthy of God, you have a plain mark to distinguish the Cheat by ; if it be worthy of God, there is no such great hurt in your receiving it. But indeed, you are under no necessity of being deceived in this matter ; for, as there is no Evidence given of the Divinity of the Doctrine, so you may, and ought to withhold your assent. It may be expected, that if God designs you should receive the Doctrine, he would give you Evidence, that it came from him, by Ordering some Works to be performed, which *not only may, but must* discover his approbation of it.

2. Others define a Miracle to be Supernatural Work, meaning thereby, a Work above, or contrary to the Course of Nature, i.e. those Laws, by which matter acts, as they were

were given it from the Creation. But now, if we consider it, we shall see, that matter is incapable of any Laws, and can't indeed act at all, in any proper Sense. Matter, is a solid, divisible, moveable Substance; it can't begin motion, or when 'tis in motion stop, or alter its direction: All this must proceed from some intelligent Agent, not giving Laws to an incapable Subject, but continually interposing, to act himself; tho' according to stated Rules: And therefore, the continual alteration of the direction of the Planets motions, and causing them to move in Curve Lines about the Sun, must be owing to some continual Force, impressed by an intelligent Agent.

But if there were such things, as Laws of Nature, in the Sense contended for, yet it would be nothing to the Purpose; for still, that would often appear to us a very great Miracle, which might not be contrary to these Laws, but only a suspending them for a time: v.g. the suspending an heavy Body in the Air, or Water; between which, and the common Works of Men, there would be no difference, but that the one was done Visibly, the other Invisibly.

What has been said under this Head, shews the absurdity of *Spinoza's* Arguments
against

against Miracles ; which are wholly built on this, *viz.* That there are necessary Laws of Nature, which can't be repealed ; and therefore a Miracle, which is supposed to be contrary to these Laws, must be absolutely impossible : But now, as there are no such necessary Laws, but as the whole Order of Nature, tho' regular and settled, yet is purely arbitrary, so all this reasoning falls to the Ground.

3. Others, define a Miracle to be, that which is above the Powers of Matter and Motion : Let us Consider this a little. Matter is an extended, solid, divisible, movable Substance. These are all the properties of Matter we know ; all the rest that are called properties of any particular Bodies, are only the different relations, that the parts of Matter, (which is a movable Substance) bear to one another ; by means of which they excite different Ideas in us ; as of roundness, and squareness, &c. and are not really properties of Matter at all. Matter is a Substance capable of being moved ; but Motion, is not essential to it : When put in motion, it will move on in a right line, 'till its motion be stopped, or its direction altered. If then a Miracle be defined, that which is above the Powers of Matter ; the Original motion of the Planets, in right lines

lines, must be a Miracle: Or, if Motion be taken into the definition, still the continual alteration of their direction is a Miracle: The common Law of Gravity, must be a Miracle every where.

The formation of all intelligent Beings, (since Matter is not Essentially intelligent) is a Miracle: The Union of some intelligent Beings with Matter must in like manner be so: Nay, the formation of the human Body at first, must be as much a Miracle, as its reformation, when dissolved in the Grave.

4. Others define a Miracle to be a Work performable by God only: But now according to this Notion, none of those Works, which we call Miracles, may be really such, since we dont know the powers of all the Beings above us, that are the Creatures of God: If their Power did not exceed ours (which yet we may be sure it does) they would, meerly by their being invisible, perform such Works, as we should call some the greatest of Miracles, such as suspending a Body in the Air, &c.

And as we don't know the natural powers of Beings above us, so we don't know the Laws they are under, and can never be sure they are under perpetual Restraints from doing those Works, we should think, meerly

merely from the Works themselves, to be done by the power of God. We don't know but God may answer wise Ends by suffering, sometimes, evil Spirits to do such Works ; and since he has given us means sufficient for detecting the Cheat, there is no more difficulty in God's permitting these, than the Frauds of wicked Men. The Evidence therefore of a Miracle to any Doctrine, does not lie here, *viz.* That Miracles are the natural Signs of God's Approbation ; for that they are not, except they be supposed performable by God only, which can never be proved ; or that the Person who appeals to 'em, appeals to God, who is therefore obliged, by his Veracity, not to answer the Appeal by the signs of Miracles, if the Appeal were not just ; just as an honest Man would not answer such an Appeal made to him, by Words, or any other Signs agreed on amongst Men. All this goes on the supposition of Miracles being performable by God only ; for otherwise there is no more absurdity in supposing God should suffer evil Spirits, than wicked Men, to perform Works by which they should deceive ; when in both Cases the Cheat might, with equal Ease, be detected : Miracles can't be natural Signs of God's Approbation, except they are supposed

fed performable by God only : And arbitrary Signs are here out of the Case, because the knowledge of 'em supposes a Revelation.

Well then, at last, *What is a Miracle?* 'Tis abundantly evident from what has been already said, that *It must be a Work of some superior Spirit* : But as we don't know but the common effects of Nature are the Works of such Spirits, so we must add to the Definition; *Uncommon and extraordinary, for some particular Purpose; as the proof of a Doctrine, that it comes from God*: And lastly, because bad Spirits may on some occasions be *permitted* to perform such sort of Works, *tho' not commission'd by God*, in order to the proof of any Doctrine; so we must add, *Perform'd by good Spirits, commission'd by God, if not wrought immediately by God himself.*

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